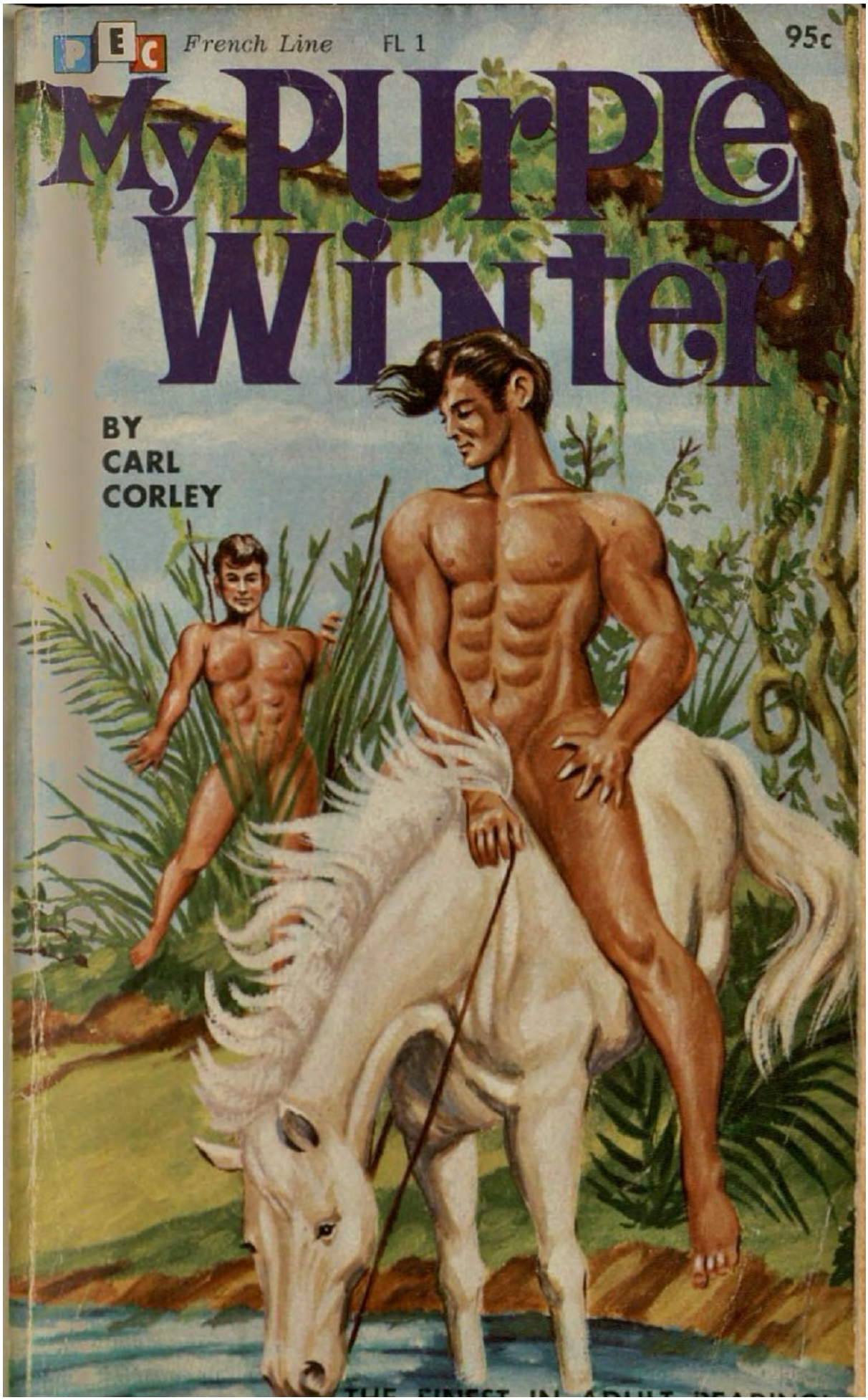
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MY PURPLE WINTER

By
CARL CORLEY

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A PEC GIANT

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CHAPTER ONE

My name is Brut Toro—a name of which I will always be proud—yet it is a name which but poorly perceives my nature, for I am neither brutish (nor brave), nor, yet, am I Spanish. My name is like my mother, who gave it to me in the violence of the stormy night on which I was born—and I am like her, too—wild and passionate and strange . . .

A dark, gypsy-woman, my mother, and she bore me out of some sort of strange and bitter rebellion; bore me despite her hate for her marriage and the bonds of her settled life. Hers was an identical passion against both these aversions . . . the same hate which roused in her at anything ugly or unclean. My mother was a rover and she was born for the gypsy's life; the joy and sorrow of the wanderer; the wealth of a world which is new around each curve of the long, long road. Caught, caged, prisoned by her marriage and its house, her spirit could not soar and had no outlet for its emotions and, so, turned dumb within her.

The owl may fly; the mockingbird may sing his raucous song but my mother owned neither flight nor song. Yet, like the mockingbird, there was the store of golden music in her heart and, like the toneless owl,

she knew in her heart the intoxication, the joy of a fancied flight on an endless May morning.

All the wonderful things my mother felt for and in

nature—and could not express as she wanted—all the stored honey, the black hatreds, the deep, never-ending homesickness for the unfenced wild—these my mother gave me. The whole meaning of her wayward heartbeat flowed into my own, softly-beating heart, as though she passionately threw a life she did not want and could not give a value, into my own outstretched arms.

When I was at the age of fifteen, she was fled like the leaves and the winged creatures of departed summers, but her deep love for me was so strong, so imposing, so overwhelming—like a dark room filled with the smother of a strong perfume—that, when I reached pubertly, I had turned from the attitudes of a normal existence and had given myself to love of my own sex. My admiration was for the male—which I considered the more colorful, the more glamorous of the two.

In the fabric of my life, that this should happen was only natural. My mother's love for me was consuming and overwhelming and, to feel affection for another woman would have been an impossibility. I could never have but one mother. The soft wings of her love, trembling about me, shutting out the light, the wind, the smell of the world outside, drowned and filled me to the exclusion of all other females forever. To have offered affection to one would have been an affront to the love my mother spun around me like a cocoon.

At that callow age, approaching the threshold to young manhood, the sap of my loins full-blossomed and ripe for harvest, I had never known the father's love I so sorely needed. I was sick on affection. I

wanted something stronger, something freer, more violent, cleaner—something to counterbalance the cloying, stifling cloud of her love which locked me, lightless, speechless, deaf, within the soft but unbreakable barriers of her world.

There was no way I could look but to the male. Here was the perfect proxy to the flowery rooms, the velvet-draped windows, the wine-colored shadows—even at highest noon—together with the wax roses within their cages of glass, the white lace curtains which cascaded down the windows to throw their fantastic patterns of light and shadow on the thick carpets, the endless tapestries, the interminable evenings alone with her while the haunting strings of her harp invaded my senses. The discords within her found their way to expression, not through words, but through the delicate fingers as they caressed the strings of the vibrating instrument until I felt as though those same strings were looped about my throat and would strangle me with their soft, unrelentless pressure.

It was my mother who was to blame for my strange, my deeply dark passions, even at that age of inexperience—and yet, my heart feels pain at even attaching the thought of blame to her, so little did she deserve it. Where was she to turn? Where could she give her love? She and [illegible] father were so indifferent to each

one and my father were so indifferent to each other as to make me think one did not know of the existence of the other. They were as indifferent to each other as day and night, with no blending of twilight or dawn to establish the reality of their diverse identities.

They did not hate each other. It was not that. Their own, deep, silent passions took opposite directions and contrary forms. My mother steeped herself in playing the harp, in her embroidery, in her overwhelming love for me. My father engrossed himself in his passion for the fields, his collection of coins and his warped and blind hatred and distrust of anything which was beautiful. Here only did conflict between them emerge—he hated beauty because she loved it. He hated me, for the same, punishing reason. There was nothing wifely about her nor parental about my father and, in all the time I can remember them, not once do I recall ever having seen any evidence of affection between them.

I think my father always hated me. It was his defense against her, to spoil for her anything which brought her joy. He called me "runt"—which, I suppose, I was—and often, scornfully remarked that I should have been "thrown back" at my birth. I am small, just barely over five feet high and my burden on the scales comes to barely a hundred and twenty pounds. Yet, I was hearty as we who are small must be in order to survive existence among the giants. I possessed robust health and, according to my mother's admiring description, strikingly good looks and a perfectly proportioned body. These attributes came from my Greek heritage. In school I never entered into the

athletics or games and did little to enhance my miniature, but muscular, physique.

Like the Greeks (my grandfather had come to Rankin county, Mississippi from Athens) I loved the out-of-doors . . . the rich blackness of the soil, the thick of nature's own smells strong in my nostrils. My growing

years were spent in the midst of these, riding horses, plowing, doing numerous chores on my father's farm —all helping to make the bud of my youth burgeon, rich, and full and compelling. From the constant life in the open, my skin was as dark as an acorn and was smooth and radiant with health. I was proud of it and of the riot of black curls which crowned my head and tumbled into my eyes, coming to a clean point at the back of my neck. My eyes were those of my mother—strange, fawn-colored eyes like water with tawny flecks floating in their large, clear irises. In their shy honesty, her eyes (and mine) were akin to those of a fox or other wild thing and in all my characteristics of stance and motion I was patterned after her—graceful and covert as any wild creature's.

My life, up fifteen years, would have been a lonely one had it not been for my mother's undivided concentration of her love on me. The excessive warmth and doting on me did not, happily, damage my vigor because I often felt my manhood pulse and I fought against the smothering affection of my mother just as I resisted the corroding hatred my father turned on me.

Mother never learned the rudiments of music—was never a master of the harp—but there was within her that native and natural ability to draw music from

whatever was designed to create it. On long, rainy evenings when Papa was away and just the two of us stayed snug under the dry roof, her fingers would leap and search and agitate the harpstrings and the passionate despair and the despairing passion of her Gypsy's soul would fill the room, seemingly to bursting. So wildly did she play—so great was her forlorn

abandon in the music she made—the freshly-cut flowers would tremble with their vases and the dark living-room would shudder with the vibrations.

"It's the angels answering," she would whisper, in awe, when the walls would creak under the pulsing agitation of the harp's strings. "It's the flutter of their wings as they hover to listen!"

Whether it was the angels listening, I will never know, but there were times when her heart and her soul and her fingers were caught up in something mystic and paralyzing and compelling—something outside herself, conjured up by the fire and heartbreak and agony of her music—which reached into the dark places of her soul, the places where genius and madness lurk and contained the darkly flashing stream of her existence as it poured out in sound. On these occasions, when it was time to go to my bed, I did so in wonder, expecting in the dark some manifestation of the unnameable and indescribable something which swept out into this world through my mother's frenzied and possessed fingers.

At yet other times she would be obsessed with her embroidery and her nimble fingers would make the glinting needle fly

gliding needle fly over the enormous cloths, trapped and stretched taut in the frame. Her back arched (I can never recall my mother sitting in a chair with even her shoulders touching the back of it), her eyes gathering to her mind the myriad colors with which she worked her magic.

"Come, Bru," she would whisper when she had finished with a tapestry. "Feel the softness of the silk thread; feel the colors; see the picture I have painted

with these many strands . . ." And I would run my finger-tips over the gleaming surface she had created, following her fingers, gazing as she drank in the spectacle. "It is like the lawn of a fairy's castle," she would whisper softly . . .

To this day, when I am in the stores of New Orleans, and encounter the huge tapestries which abound in the shops on Royal Street, I need only pause to see a surface with my finger-tips and the texture lures me back to my mother and my memories of her. And my eyes never fail to flood with scalding tears in my sorrow for the loss of her. Within me beats the somber pain of ignorance. I do not know where she is—I know not if she is alive—my poor, brave, unhappy mother . . . the substance of my youth and the fashioner of my existence.

When I was very small, she would point things out for me, call to my attention the teeming activity of the nature all about us. The budding plants, the tadpoles in the pond, to the caterpillars (calling them "butterflies-to-be"), to wasps building their houses of mud and to the bees, busily coming and going across the clean white boards which provided the way to

the clean, white boards which provided the way to
and from the neat, white hives Papa built and set in
rows down the orchard. No bud was too small—none
too drab in color—not to deserve her pointing it to my
attention. In the early spring, our feet would wander
through the damp woodlands, noting the newly-blos-
soming dogwood—"the cross of Jesus" she called the
flowers—rolling May balls until they were purple,
picking up shells and sharks' teeth in an old stone
quarry. To my round-eye amazement she explained

that, once upon a time, this was the bottom of the sea. Sometimes, we'd pick cowslips, which she described as "keys to heaven." In those wondrous days and years with her, neither the woods nor the water looked darksome in the fine southern spring, with the bursting of the new leaves and buds the color of corn in the birch-tops. Only in our own, deep oak woods was there ever a look of the back-end of the year, the young leaves looking so brown, and I would always instinctively take her hand when we wandered through the dimness of its depths.

It was always a thing of pleasure to sit with her in the meadows and look up into the far hills. The larches spired up in their quick green; the cowslip gold seemed to steal into your fabric and even the pond seemed but a blue mist in a yellow fog of birch tops. Over it all was the flavor of a dream—the whole place was caught and held in it with a quiet and serenity which shattered with a jar at no more tumultuous a passing than the hum of a wild bee. Even this small furore brought me up with a start, so deep was

the unreality.

I wish God would give me such calm, such serene experience of time a-stop, now. How I hunger to clamber back through the years to relive those precious, golden sensations. There was little sense of time, only of great happiness and peace which I have forever lost . . . happiness with no aftermath of pain nor terror nor tomorrow . . . pure, crystal, exquisite. I steep in remorse for not knowing, then, how infinitely precious, how magnificently valuable was the treasure I held in the warmth and security of her great love.

Now that I have lost her, forever, the emptiness is like a cold weight within me, heightened by the unwelcome light through the tree-tops when a great trunk has been severed by the woodsman and the felled giant leaves the gap of his departure in the dappled structure of the roof overhead. The sky leaks into the empty place and sorrow dances with fear along the high-tossed branches.

I remember all she ever told me, but one thing she said will always stand clear in my memory, because it was so much herself. It was early spring and we were venturing through the apple orchard. The bees whined about our heads, then joined in the long, black threads of their speedy flights. My mother was showing me the pink apple blossoms, or buds, for they had not, as yet, frothed.

"They are little babies' hands," she had said, smiling as she bent a limb down so that I could see them closely. "Little pink fists closed over tiny pieces of gold."

gold.

Greedily, after the manner of all children, I pulled one of the wee buds apart, searching in vain for the tiny, precious store but no little gold coin was there. The petals fell, absently, from my trembling, eager hands.

"There's nothing in them," I said, disappointment showing in my eyes.

"But you do not see them with your eyes," she explained, "you see them with your heart."

In that one phrase she caught the reality of her life.

One comment of my father's, too, has stuck with its barbed sense in my memory. The words and the

action are greatly responsible, I am certain, for setting my course toward my kind of passion. It was when I was very small and he was seated at the living room table, busy in examining his collection of coins. There was one of them which had always caught my eye and drawn my curiosity and I was so filled with the urge to examine it in detail, I'd tremble each time I saw it. It was a huge coin, of gold, brought to these lands by my grandfather from Greece. The gleam of its surface contained, in exquisite detail, a relief of a naked god, a youth molded and formed with muscles and conformation of a striking beauty. To see it there, under the lamplight, always sent my emotions into a state near ecstasy.

On this occasion, my desire and determination combined to make me reach out and slide the coin from the table into my hands. My father, busily poring over a book on coin collection, failed to notice my action immediately. It gave me a moment in which to study

immediately. It gave me a moment in which to study the figure and in that brief time I memorized every last detail. The figure was totally naked and I trembled at the clarity of the clear manifestation of his male sex. As I gazed, I began to tremble in some mysterious longing and, becoming faint, must have gasped for breath.

My father turned abruptly and, seeing the coin in my hands, slapped me smartly across the mouth almost in the same motion snatching the coin from my child-size fingers.

"It is forbidden!" he shouted, putting the coin back among the others. That one word has echoed through the years in my mind. Linked with the beauty of the

naked god on the coin, the "forbidden!" has dominated my dreams and, ultimately, my actions, never failing to leave me with a sense of dark, continuing guilt in my sexual encounters with boys. The word "forbidden!" has made it all the more daring a thing, the more mysterious, the more darkly secretive.

It drove me like a whip—yet, at the same time, it pulled me backward as though I were reined by invisible threads. It was this thing which drove me ceaselessly—drove me to Dany Buck and beyond. That one word, despite all my father's stern discipline and the heavy tax of prohibition which he laid upon my life, made futile any effort to sway body or mind from this same path of desperate and consuming desire.

Had my father ever shown the slightest affection or regard for me; had he even represented himself as an ideal—an elevated pattern to offer me a challenge—I

know my desires would have followed the channels dictated by my masculine conformation in normal fashion. But not once did he ever manifest anything to or for me. When I sought for love among my own sex, it was the love my father denied me. Beyond those gloriously happy days with Dany Buck, as I searched deeper and further into the dark concrete caverns of New Orleans; searched in that jungle sans inhibitions, the French Quarter; searched Royal and Bourbon and St. Charles Streets and their bars, taverns and dance halls; searched in the crumbling apartments crammed back of the walled courtyards; I was, blindly and mindlessly as a child, still seeking that which was forever lost to me—that love my father had refused to

give. The compulsion which kept me on this do
search for something out of my youth, I recog
was futile but resisting it was something which,
me, was every bit as impossible as ignoring the
my father shouted across the naked, golden god at

I later knew my father never loved anyo
anything, even the farm, over which his eyes r
longingly. As he devoured the acres with his h
gaze, it was not from love of the land or of the
but only in crass speculation on what it could be
to yield up to his grasping, insensible hands.

His farm lay upon a rise amid numerous other
crowned with dark sable pine and cedar—as
mother described it: half in faery and half out—a
glowed a deep emerald, a gem-like lustre in a s
of gray and violet clover. Mississippi country is

colorless. It still holds, when every blossom is
ered, in its great, mysterious expanses, a bloom w
is like the spirit of the departed blossoms. Against
subdued surrounding of the fields and slopes, acr
acre, the homestead's barns and stacks held and
fracted each ray of sunlight, especially at sunset.
house itself was built of find, mellow old sandston
a weatherworn and muted red which takes u
beauty all its own under the direct rays of sunrise
sunset, almost as though itself was radiating the l
which reflected from it. It was, to me, beautiful an
my mother, likewise and we loved it dearly. With
chicken houses, the silos, the smoke house and
various other essential structures, it was to me, in
days of my childhood and youth, a kingdom.

Below the hill stood the cottage where Dany E

and his parents lived; the three of them hired by my father to work the land, to tend the stock and whatever other chores were necessary to keep the farm in order and as productive as my father's grasping mind and hands could make it.

I was aged fifteen at the time existence crested in the anarchy of my nature and Dany was but four years older. The years had been friendly to Dany in the matter of his good looks and his physical perfection. His hair was almost the color of wine, dark, and it lay smoothly over his head, so alive and shiny and clean it was as though he took a brush to it daily. The gold-tipped strands matched the color of his skin which was utterly smooth without blemish or scar and radiantly bronzed from the hot southern sun, the

winds and the ministrations of the out-of-doors. His eyes were a deep brown, the shiny brown of leaves at the bottom of a quiet forest pool and, somehow, Dany always looked at you from the depths of them, never the surface. When he looked, you melted, for his eyes were like his heart, deepened and saddened a little by a lifetime of servitude to hard tasks and long hours and wages of mere existence—but there was also the mellow quality of consideration and an overflow of understanding in them. Dany was as pure as home-made bread, as clean as hill spring water, as simple as a breath and he possessed no hint of the guile, the cunning and the deceit so common among my school-mates. All things he was, I was not, and recognized this as truth. You could—which I never did—tell him the most impossible lie and he would believe it. In the simplicity of his uncomplex nature, he was, in all

truth, monumentally gullible—but in Dany it was no fault. His gullibility helped me win him for my own.

My father may have bought his hands and his never-tiring servitude, but his body and his heart, I know, belonged to me.

When I watched Dany pitch hay, milk or do any manual chore with his lithe, savage's body stripped darkly to the waist, it was like a kind of music humming in my blood. His tight blue jeans revealing, like a second skin, the play of each magnificent muscle in his thighs and buttocks as he worked, the light glistening on his bare torso, wet with sweat. He had the swarthy, rakish look of a pirate about him, wearing—as he always did—cuffed rain-boots for his work.

Filling my eyes and my consciousness with the picture of him, I would tremble as one in the throes of a seizure. Lifting the powerfully muscled arms to toss forks full of hay onto the thatch, I would get glimpses of those dark patches of hair beneath his armpits and this would release in me, like imps and devils of desire, the frantic longing to see the other dark patch of hair I knew must decorate the fork of his magnificent thighs.

Like the coin, the bright, magnetic image on the coin, I thirsted and I suffered to see him in detail . . . every detail . . . and to know what crowned that dark area I could see, yet could not see where the tight jeans bulged and swelled at the crotch. The agitation which visited this mysterious place of my fever, when Dany's muscles were bulging and straining at heavy tasks, would leave me without breath, my heart pounding like the heavy sledge his huge hands

wielded as easily as a toy.

Because I was younger than he, (or perhaps it was because he worked for my father and felt, thus, obligated to do my bidding) I do not know, but he was ever good to me, dropping his work to do this or do that at my whim. Then, sometimes it would be necessary for him to work into the dark to catch up with the chores he had abandoned for me. Those favors he accorded were like holy relics to me, adding with each, another medal to my collection in the daring, silent passion of love for him which possessed me and consumed me. When, by chance, his hand, hot in the exertion of labor, would brush mine as I worked

beside him, shock would jolt through me, leaving in its aftermath a weakening limpness which threatened to collapse me.

One afternoon, working at a remote haystack, the flash of black beneath Dany's arms roused me to new heights of yearning desire and the imps the sight freed within me set me to tormenting him at every turn. Often we laughed and teased each other with word and gesture but this day my fever led me to new areas of daring and, laughing excitedly, I pushed him backward into the haystack. Caught off balance, Dany fell, spread-eagled and laughing at being thus tripped up. Quick as a cat, though he was back on his feet, a hand darting like a striking snake to imprison an ankle and snatch me, head over heels, into the soft, warm fragrant cushion. Sputtering and fighting for breath, I made for him and locked my arms around the supple, slippery waist as though to wrestle him off his feet. With a deep chuckle, Dany's hands took my hips like

a pair of velvet vises, turned me end for end and dropped me back in the hay. Before I could regain my feet, he was upon me, laughing and teasing.

"We wrestle, ha?" he asked as my breathing stopped for a pace and his hot body descended on my own. Somehow I knew I must continue to struggle to keep the stricture of the hard-muscled arms and the heat of the smooth, sweaty skin against mine. Ecstasy roared through me as I writhed and turned as one possessed and my manhood rose and beat against its tight confinement as the unequal struggle went on. Finally, the end came, all too soon, yet almost too thick with

ecstasy to bear. Dany, laughing in triumph, pinned my body, flat, beneath his and I felt the rigid press of his crotch against mine, the pain almost too much to bear but too bittersweetly marvelous to resist. With teeth clenched, I arched my small, rigid body against the fulcrum of my mingled agony and delight as Dany, with my arms pinioned above my threshing head, held me supine and helpless. Slowly the smile faded from his shining, face, gleaming with the sweat of his exertions as he knew the direction of my desire.

"Ah, Bru, the sap is risen," he said, quietly, slowly freeing the crush of his crotch on mine and sinking back on his haunches. I sat up, shaking, eyes finding the huge displacement of his bulging jeans as my hand sought my pants in an attempt to ease the constriction of my garment. Dany came to his feet and extended a hand to me, to bring me upright. I felt as though all my father's bees were buzzing in the fevered throbbing of my body and I gasped for breath as my eyes, still bound to the sight of Dany's swollen crotch,

fought to stay open against the pull of the heavy lids . . .

From that moment, the memory of his hard-muscled limbs and the torturous ecstasy of the moment plunged and struggled within me, both in dreams and in daylight. Where once my desire had been a yearning for an unknown thing, one full-moonlit night I dropped off into fitful, twisting sleep and the dream of Dany returned. As, in my fancy, I once more struggled in the precious mystery of his crushing limbs, I collapsed, paralyzed, in the grip of an ecstasy which

drained me and frightened me and left me in thrall to the mighty wonder of it. From that night onward, my want for Dany was as simple as my hunger for bread, my thirst for water and my need for rest. I wanted him with the thwarted rage of fifteen and I followed him about the farm, constantly, his shadow and his tempter—though I did not then realize it—leading him, his body and his emotions into a cage which would make him prisoner . . . my prisoner . . . for life.

Not that I am, basically, ruinous. I was desperately lonely, without brother or sister to share my existence; desperate to escape the woolen, suffocating affection of my mother (tragic for one at that time of life; starving for a relief from my loneliness and for love denied me by my father.

On looking back on those times of my torture and inexperience, gathering in my memory bits and recollections of them, I realize now that Dany was equally lonely. He had neither brother nor sister and his parents—dry, brittle, squeezed of emotion by lives of hard field labor and long years of servitude, were

insensible to him or his needs.

One spring evening, having gotten into a quarrel with my father over his refusal to allow me to attend a dance at my school, I left the house, slamming the screen door thunderously behind me in a last, futile reply to his tyranny, and went down the lane toward the barn. My poor mother, wringing her hands, called after me but I paid her as much heed as I did the Martins which chattered and flitted about the front porches of their pole-top houses.

Climbing over the lane gate, rather than take the time to unlatch it, I hurried through the ankle deep clover, putting as much distance as quickly as possible between the house and me—between my father and my rage. But, halfway down the lane, with the newly-green pear trees shielding me from the house, I slowed my pace, sulking. My pout was an effective weapon for getting immediate results from my mother, but the effort was wasted on my father. He possessed neither sympathy nor understanding. Yet, he was not, really, a wicked man. It was, I believe now, that he was too shallow to be either wicked or good.

The chimney sweeps were abroad, maneuvering the quiet air before the fall of darkness, dropping like black darts out of the failing light overhead. Swooping close to my head, they darted skyward again, like the elements of an aerial attack, their harassment only heightening my unhappiness and wearing against my patience and my nerves. The lane, deepening in the softening light, lay thick with blossoms and perfume, the radiance of pear and apple mingling with the

honeysuckle and lading the air as heavily as gas, wobbling my senses—I was already half out of myself from the quarrel with my father—and enshrouding my awareness. I passed through a small stone alcove, once a summer-house, but delapidated now, the lattice all askew and the iron seats red with rust. My mother had pleased to sit long hours here, as a bride, the small structure opening out onto the terrace which formed a dam for the stock-pond. Here, the weeping willows

formed a shimmering curtain for the dark water which lay on the opposite side and, through it, I could glimpse the red ball of the setting sun, trapped in the delicate, dropping fronds of the trees. The reflection of the sinking sun was trapped in the net of water lilies at the far end of the water.

The lapping of the pond against the shore—holed by the numerous crawfish—was broken by a sharp splashing which was succeeded by silence, only to begin again. It sounded as though someone was wading out into the deeper reaches of the pond, toward its center, away from the edges of the water, filmed with floating green slime. I walked up on the mound, to get a view of the middle water.

It was Dany Buck.

Astride his black stallion, they were far out into the pond, up to his mount's belly, and Dany was stark naked. He was bathing while his stallion drank; lifting up the water by cupped, double-handsful, he spilled it over his beautiful, dark body, the drops running in sparkling rivulets over the muscles. Instantly, my eyes sought that other thicket of black, curling hair below his belly—that part of the beautiful body which, til

now, had been hidden from the fevered questing of my eyes and balked the heated curiousity of my mysterious and, until just recently, my unknown desire. My nerves, already a-quiver with the results of quarreling with my father, sang and jangled and fluttered anew. My knees shaking under me as my head reeled, suddenly I knew that, having glimpsed the forbidden treasure, nothing would do but I must capture it with

my hands.

Brave, then, past all recalling; wild with a consuming curiosity which would not be swerved, no matter what the consequences, I quickly stripped my clothes from my throbbing body and strode onto the bank in the open.

Dany looked up and saw me. He did not seem surprised. A white grin split the deep tan of his face as he flashed me a broad grin, the teeth shining in the gathering twilight like the seashells my mother and I had gathered in the old rock quarry.

"Gonna take a bath, little Bru?" he asked, shyly, turning his stallion to steer him from the water.

"Thought I would take a swim," I blurted, hardly able to get the words out over the hard ball of breath lodged just under my breastbone. I was a little conscious of my nakedness, now that we were face to face.

He reined the stallion directly up to me, then slid off with the casual grace of a circus performer. His smile remained and I noticed, with an additional leap of my struggling heart, his eyes go over my body in a single, all-encompassing look. Now I know it to be a natural instinct, for the male is as curious of other males as of the mysteries of the female.

"It's too slimy for swimming," he cautioned, pointing to the bright green scum from the fertilizer my father had put into the water for the black bass. "In another month, it'll be gone."

"I—I'll put my clothes back on, then," I stammered, feeling suddenly ridiculous and finding nothing else to do or say as the casual words broke the magic of the

spell and unmanned the former boldness which had surged from my loins to command my actions. I could not, however, keep from looking at him, his great, fine brooding body now at last unhusked before my starving, heated eyes. The full glory of his groin was open to the search of my gaze, the black hair, so savage in its dripping wet, like damp moss curling over rocks—over the smooth contours of his thick staff and his great stones—the hair concealing yet revealing his male beauty, like the scud of low clouds across the face of the full moon.

"No need to fly," he suggested, his words casual and unhurried. "Stay a bit. Let the air cool your body—like I'm doing." He turned, twisting at the waist from side to side, arms held straight outward, as the cool breeze, heavy with intoxicating perfume, blew upon his fish-slick skin.

How primeval he looked—like a youth out of the mists of a forgotten past—like something from the stone age, standing in this emerald paradise, his thick arms and legs clad with black, wiry hair; his chest rising and falling easily with the rich vigor of the life which surged within him; his profile fine and delicate as a pagan prince.

Whether he asked me to remain as an invitation to

something still greater to come, I will never know, but a span of mules could not have dragged me from the spot where the sight of his naked body rooted me. To crown my surging curiosity, the greed of my young, eager senses by gazing—merely—at his beautiful,

naked body was laurel and purpose enough to delay my departure forever, if it could be. I had wanted (rather, I had longed in fevered desperation) to see him undressed since the first glimpse of the dark fleece beneath his arms which, blazoned against the golden mahogany of his skin, mysteriously promised unspoken and unimagined delights in the invisible remainder of his body. Now, he stood naked before me . . . Adonis, Zeus, Apollo . . . the aura of all the gods of mythology holding him in its bright, golden radiance. He was more than a god to me, for he was brilliantly, compellingly, maddeningly flesh and blood, vitally alive and no white marble form standing dead on a pedestal.

That he was so simple, so utterly of the earth—the dark heart of the soil—that he labored in the sun for a livelihood, that he was so young and dark and strong as a lion emerging from the green shadows of the bush into the full sunlight, all this made him the more shudderingly, thrillingly desirable to me. Too, I loved him. The simple cast of his nature made me love him. To me, Dany was all things pure and good, all things noble and clean and earthily savage because of them. He was untouched, untried, a virgin just as I, untarnished by dirty hands and filthy tongues of the world outside this kingdom. His very purity made him all the more maddeningly desirable and I quivered in the

grip of it.

He pretended at drying himself with his old, tattered shirt—a shirt too ragged for so splendid a person—as he delayed the moment. Occasionally, as the

singing time spun out, his eyes diverted to my own body and this open and guileless eyeing sent new stings and pricks of elated excitement plunging through me. He divided his glances between me and the calm reaches of the darkening water. I became conscious of somehow knowing that Dany was deliberately drawing out the moment and my heart almost burst with happiness. Rather than dress and resume his nightly chores, he was lingering, naked, under my eyes and with me under his and my happiness threatened to choke me. He waved the shirt before him, fanning his body, then playfully he snapped it to pop me on the ass with it. The impact stung sharply and I let out a faint, instinctive cry of protest then laughed with him. Though it hurt, he could not have driven me away with a blacksnake whip.

"It made a red spot," he said, moving to me, his voice a little shaken—perhaps by the offense. He reached out one corded arm and rubbed the place where the wet shirt had crimsoned my skin.

"You got a cute little ass," he said, then, rubbing my buttock lovingly. His voice, pitched low in his throat, trembled. "You shoulda been a girl. You're small, like a girl—smooth, like a girl . . ."

"Papa says I'm a runt," I managed to get out, my whole being responding to his caress, my own voice as shaky as the leaves which trembled in the breeze over our head. "But Grandpa was small," I forced myself

onward. "Papa said he could out-work most men—men twice as big as him. He worked in the Attican vineyards, toting big, heavy baskets of grapes. I'm

small, but I'm not weak, Dany Buck."

"That you're not," he murmured agreement, easing closer to me. I shuddered in delight as his chest came against my back now, a slight, warm touch all the way down as his massive, heated loins lightly lay against my buttocks, the great thighs just touching the backs of mine. "Little but loud," he continued, the words blanketed in a hoarse chuckle. His arms slid under mine and then about my waist, sliding upward until his fingers reached my chest-plates to press and try them, roughly. His huge fingers upon my chest, the roughened skin of them brushing, lightly pinching the muscles and the hardening nipples, suddenly drained every bit of my strength and I wanted nothing more than to flow backwards and melt into his being. "You got strong muscles," he went on, his voice now cracked with tremors and my heart leapt again, triumphantly, at the sound of the tremble because I knew his feeling was as mine. "You'll take a wife someday, Bru, and give her what she needs—what she wants, I swear . . ."

At the sound of his words, pairing me off with someone else, I suddenly felt apart and alone and Dany's warmth seemed somehow to become remote, aloof. I turned slightly to increase the pressure of our touch, not daring to alter my stance.

"Won't you marry, too, Dany?" I asked—though instinctively jealous of the thought of anyone else having him, anyone else knowing him, loving him. We

were so secure here—here amidst these quiet acres,

surrounded by the soft warmth of the countryside—so secure in our friendship for each other. And I asked again: "You will marry, won't you, eh, Dany?"

"Na. Never, Bru," he said, his words a soft lament, the strong arms flexing softly around me to draw me slowly closer to him. "I was born to be a servant, to put my rump to the dirt, to make things grow from the soil and rise from the stone . . . born to sweat. Aye, little Bru, I was born to sweat."

"That's not true," I protested, instantly angered in his behalf, my mind recalling visions of his wonderful body in the fields, the beautiful picture of him, framed against the reddening sky. "You're fine, Dany . . . meant for finer things than working for Papa. You're noble and strong and good of heart and something will come of it someday—you just wait and see! You'll have things, someday . . . a home, a car, fine clothes for your body, your pockets stuffed with money. You won't always be poor . . . not you, Dany Buck!" My chest heaved with the tangling emotions fighting within it as Dany's hands pressed more firmly, bringing my body more closely against his and the touch made my nerves sing with a joy too great, almost, to withstand. Every hunger, every wish, every writhing, straining dream of the unknown desire which had wracked me for so long, was rising, like air bubbles rushing to the pond surface in me, my head threatening to burst with the giddy madness which raced through me like tiny pinches and bites of sheer ecstasy.

"You mean that, Bru?" his husky whisper asked. "You want those fine things for me—not like your

Papa, to keep me working and working . . . ?"

The sound of his voice, so drawling, so raddled with passion, broke the last shackle of my restraint and I poured out my confession, the torturing secrets which, before, I had only confessed to myself.

"You're too fine for dirt," I blurted, spurred now by the hard arms around me, his concern for what I thought of him. It hurt me, now, that in this moment —only now—I reached the painful realization that all his life, no one had paid him the vaguest attention, none had really cared what he felt or said or did . . . except that he work. The same as a horse or an ox or a mule. It stung me that I was, until this surging moment, too much of a deceitful fool to know how lacking we others had allowed his life to be. And I wanted, desperately, to make all of it up to him—every empty moment of it, here and now on this wild night and in this maddening moment. "Dany!" I cried, desperately, putting all my love for him into the one glorious word, "I only want one thing in this world—your happiness. If you are ever unhappy, then I shall want to die!"

"Oh Bru, my little Bru!" he gasped, hoarsely, the words having the ring of an angel's whisper close in my ear. He turned my body to face his and swept me into his arms. His dark head bent over mine and he kissed me full on the lips, slowly and unsurely at first, then forcefully, maddeningly, savagely. My own body melted into his and I went limp in his primitive embrace. Suddenly he was my world and, like melted wax, it flowed over me, warmly, covering me and devouring me and, above it all, beyond knowing and

beyond reason and beyond the sound of my wildly hammering heart, I could hear his whisper:

"I won't ever leave you, Bru, or the farm, ever. I won't, Bru, I won't. I'll do whatever you want me to, I don't care—just whatever you want me to do. I won't ever leave the farm, or your Papa. I just work—live for you, just care . . . just care a little for me . . . please!"

The urgency of his words stung my reply out of me. "I care," I heard myself saying, swept down the chasm of writhing sensation by the hot pressure of his lips upon mine. "I love you and I'll always love you—til the day I die . . ."

The huge arms with which he held me, hot from their hours, bare to the sun, were like steel, enveloping me, holding me secure and safe against the dark unhappiness of the world. He was taking my life, as I knew it, shredding it to threads and scattering it on the wind. What I had dreamed about him was coming true and the sense of change in me, in him—in everything—flooded through me sharply. The farm, the land, the trees—everything rose in my mind with a new and startling beauty and the dull, unattentive life I had suddenly lost, I knew I would never wish to recall. There was a strangely greater meaning to everything I sensed—the empty gap of my past was filling up with his lips, his tongue, his dark, hard body, spilling over the rim and running down the sides. I was enclosed with his love, his ardent caresses, safe inside the enclosure of Dany, secure against the acid of the outside world, safe where it could never reach us, touch us nor corrode us again. This world belonged to Dany and to me and everything was

locked, shut, barred out, abandoned, well-lost and forgotten.

Dany's arms went down my body to my tensed and hardened buttocks and I could feel the toil-roughened skin of his fingers fondle their trembling surface lovingly. The great hands pressed me against him and I could feel, hard and throbbing against my belly, the enormous hunger of his loins, hot and unyielding. The lesser heat and dimension of my own body lay between us, two, the pair of us caught in the enveloping trap of our bellies as we gasped for breath. Dany raised his mouth from mine, conscious of the mutual entrapment and his eyes, as he looked at me from their quiet brown waters, were spun in reflections of the dying sun; two amber lanterns from the darkness; twin lamps spilling over with the raindrops of his tears.

Our bodies moved together, down onto the soft dusk of purple clover, no more heeding our surroundings than if he had been locked in the deepest bowels of the earth, safe from the scathing eyes of the world. We groped for each other, our hands tasting, trying and trembling against the shuddering response of our entire frames, the temblors wracking us past all thought of control. We were hid, safe from the world; safe even from the accusing eyes of God in the subluminous gloaming, warm and safe and loving with an intensity which threatened to drive us mad.

The horny, toil-roughened hands, now miraculously soft as velvet, encompassed my naked body to turn me over on hands and knees, and Dany mounted me, the enormous, purplish shaft catching an instant reflection

of dying light on its swollen-to-bursting extremity. Rigid as his stallion with the knowledge of a fresh filly in his flared nostrils, Dany's manhood found its target swiftly and went instantly home, sending intense explosions of pain tapping each bone and joint and, in turn, transforming the swift fire to molten delight. Each move of his muscular body seemed a premeditated art, a rapture all its own. His thick thighs, the muscles cording and writhing beneath the harsh coat of black hair, chafed my smooth legs, my buttocks and was ecstasy in the chafing. The rhythm of his every muscle, the rise and fall of his hard, hungry body, the driving and the relenting was like the reverberation of the huge bell I'd heard once from up in the steeple, stupefying in its force, thrilling in its vibration. Our bodies shook and shuddered, the roaring in my eardrums became the uproar of unspeakable, tempest-flogged water. Dany acted like a man in the act of rape, but in the raping beguiled his victim into acceptance; making the victim glorify the acceptance. I was his and, in the full power of his massive body, he took his fill of me, unleashing his full strength, his huge capacity, the total expression of himself in his fulfillment on my body, in my love. His hard arms held me helpless about my chest and shoulders, he arched my body like a bow, and the unbending arrow of his hunger crossed and recrossed the bow until, the string released, and the sharp heat of the plunging shaft vented and surged and flooded every crevice of my being. When his gasping and strangling cries began to die in his throat, as the strength and the struggle waned in muscles which turned soft and

loose, I thrilled to the flow of his body over mine, like heated syrup, the power of his structure suddenly collapsing as I thrilled. His primitive power, so dark, so brooding, so irresistable, had invaded me, swallowing me up in him. He had plucked the nectar of my youth in return for the sap of his loins. Dany was now part of me, for the best of him was in me. I held his seed like a priceless relic. Within me was his life, vitality, the vigor of his massive strength, the afterglow, the final everything which was Dany Buck.

We lay in each other's embrace, weeping like children.

The moon was just risen, its bright edge faintly reflected on the dark mirror of the pond, caught in the branches of upside-down trees and a topsy-turvy stallion, quietly cropping clover. A breeze stirred the curtains of the willow tendrils, making them dance with greater abandon on the softly rippling water. The cowslips showed luminous bald heads like new babies peopling the meadows, children in silence witnessing the lives of Dany and Brut as they fell, together, into secluded and secret anarchy. The honeysuckle sprinkled us with the rich sweetness of its blossom, exhaling the full strength of its aroma and we lay like gods of the dark, other world—asprawl in our dying passion on that other slope of life.

Up at the farmhouse, my mother was flashing her silver needles like dueling foils, creating another multi-colored tapestry as she captured the fantasy of her soaring imagination in bonds of silk. Papa was on his knees before the image of Mary and the winking altar fire before her, lighted candles resembling tiny, live

eyes, probing for the forbidden in the darkness. Papa was sending out his thin, hollow soul to the woman, hallowed by many, the whole of his inner being—the puny sacrifice of himself—to one whose fate was to bear a son and die, like the queen bee expires when her function is fulfilled.

And Dany Buck and I lay in each others' arms, having eaten of the bittersweet flower which has always been the forbidden blossom of life. We had partaken of it and had gloried in the act.

Yet, it seemed, we cowed beneath a hand, ready to strike. All that we could do was wrong; all that we did inevitably condemned to failure. Two pine boles, caught by the winds, wounded each other, bole to bole, just as Dany and I had done with our bodies. I lay and listened to the moaning of the pines. Forebodings slunk into my thoughts—forebodings which follow the instant of ecstasy and delight as birds follow the plow—haunted me now. Although I could find no words for what I felt, I knew and sensed the pressure of the night. Sensed that I had won Dany Buck, but perhaps had done something cruel in the winning. For now his hardness and strength, his god-like mien, had melted and flowed into doltishness before the prescient moment, and the inescapable fact of the thing we'd done this night.

"Don't ever leave, ever!" he sobbed, above the choking as he surreptitiously licked away the tears.

I vowed to him I would not.

A star shone through the trees above us, then, but it bent no friendly look on our naked, linked bodies. It bore upon us in winking gaze a searching, accusing

eye, and spread over me a hot sense of shame, a flush of disgrace.

A sense of imminent grief lay upon me, gray loneliness had replaced the frenzy of winning Dany, and a fear of the future settled over me, cold and dank. I remembered the forbidden coin, as Dany tried to comfort me and I felt, after all my longing, that I had been trapped by something so powerful, yet so intangible, that I was totally helpless in the snare. And, even within the trap were other mysterious doors—and which of us could tell which of them led to disaster and which to some, far-off, richer paradise?

I lay in his arms, rapt and apprehensive at once, beyond speech as I listened to the crackling of twigs, ghastly as of the sound of feet, passing tiptoe into silence and eyeing us in our differences with the world, lying locked in the darkness. There were the myriad sounds of the woods, living their night-life: the dropping of cones, the fall of needles, the breaking of twigs, the shuffling of fallen leaves by the passing zephyrs along the ground and the subdued rustle of branches and leaves and fronds in continual motion. The magnolia blossoms hung white in the gloom, like ghostly Japanese lanterns whose light could not shine through from the world of shades to our world of ecstasy and pain and reality. Our bodies, Dany's and mine, naked and still coupled, were lighter smears against the clover, black in the shadows. The fragrance drifted down upon us from blossoms everywhere, muffling our senses, drugging our perception to place everything in faery. This I could [illegible]

was as I would have it be because this was the magic

night I had discovered Dany. Everything that was beautiful in nature was mine, this night.

Since I had first been aware of the yearning toward my own sex, I had wanted Dany. I had wanted more than merely to be his companion. For a long, puzzling time I had wanted the more without knowing what my desire, really, was. Then I had a glimmering and tonight I knew the whole of it. We must touch, love, our bodies must strive in sexual delight. Yet, I could remember when all this had been not only an impossibility, but—for a much longer time—totally unknown to me. He had seemed unattainable, as was any boy for that matter, I had thought. I had imagined I was alone in the world with this strange longing; I was convinced that other boys loved girls, and only girls—and now, I knew, this was not so. How simply, how quickly, how naturally Dany and I had merged our bodies, how freely we had given without awkward blundering, without fumbling fingers handling the parts of our bodies. We had united with the instinctive experience of spirited, tried veterans of the art—not novices—though we were both untried, neither having experienced anything of sex save from our own hands, possibly, on our own bodies. I was hasty in contributing our relation to loneliness, for there was no one else to whom either could turn in such an hour. Now, lying in his arms, I knew desire for the other had brought us, finally, together. Perhaps, with Dany in part, it was the loneliness, the deprived life he led,

the life of servitude, the existence of never being served—an inferior life in which I represented his superior. However, loneliness or not, he wanted me . . .

wanted my body, my heart and my love . . . and he would have these joys. I would give them to him—I would be his. He would be the master now, and I the slave. Already his personality in sex was stronger, far, than mine—darker, more moody, more suspenseful, far more powerful, for his was the chosen role of the male. And this role he would play out through the future. He was the pursuer, the aggressor. I was the quarry, the pursued.

Already he was begging me never to leave him, to care for him. He begged me, out of that deep loneliness he lived each day in the hot, dry fields, alone, begged me from the far reaches of his brooding, moody heart . . . and the sound of his voice and the love which reached out and lay its strong arms upon me, were awakening me, actually, for the first time in my life; making me see things, feel startlingly real things, making me shudder, making my body feel exciting . . . ! They were glorious feelings which made my loins swell with flaming fever and all of it—his love, his own dark body on mine—lighted up the dark and hidden and unrealized places within me.

Until tonight, I had never lived! Rather, I had existed, drifting, complaisant. Now, I was alive! Vitally, vividly, painfully, deliciously alive!

The darkness of his unrelenting sex, his overwhelming drive, had tapped the main-stream of my arteries, flushing life—greedy with new hungers—through and

into every far crevice in my body. Dany was my world. Beyond him there was nothing. Before I had only imagined and dreamed (and what foolish dreaming it all seemed, now) of what my longing for Dany

would require for fulfillment. Now, I knew. And the reality of it, despite the shadows of it, was a thousandfold more wonderful than all the fantasies of the waking or sleeping imagination. Now, I would never cease to want him. Like the lion which has tasted human blood and must, thereafter, feed upon the flesh of man, I must have Dany. He had changed my life with the taste of his sex and now, for all my days and nights upon earth, I would hunger for him . . . a hunger I would never, quite, fulfill, yet in the partial fulfillment, abate it a moment, pumping me empty and hollow in the process, leaving me limp and helpless . . .

How happy my life was now—now in this moment with Dany; the sort of happiness which promises for the future the identical happiness the moment has wrought. I could have wept again, not for my first encounter with sex, but at the crude sweetness of him who lay locked with me. He was so ruthless, so honest toward himself as well as others. He had such strange lights and shadows in his eyes, his voice and his soul. He was so full of faults, yet so crammed with the perfection of his simple nature and so overwhelming in his fascination.

"Oh, God," I whispered to myself, "if I may have him to keep and to defend, to glow in my world like a rose, I'll ask no more."

All man's desires, such as mine at this moment; predatory, guilt-shaded, or selfless, wander away into those dark doors of the trap and are never heard of more. Among the sounds and the wonder of the night I wondered if there was one who listens and re-

members and judges the foolhardiness of men, not by efforts—but by motives? And does that one, in the majesty of everlasting vitality and irresistable peace, ever mark how we run after the bright butterfly of our desire and, obsessed with the pursuit, stumble over the dark precipice? If it is that he marks the wavering, calamity-hued lives of all creatures—especially the most beautiful and the most helpless (like Dany)—does he ever weep or even sigh as we do for sorrow at a child claimed by death or the wing of a moth impaled on a thorn?

Life's heaviest burden is that we cannot know. For all the tears, the secret chastisement, the treadmill of prayer, we cannot know.

When the dew came out, Dany drew away from me and lifted me from the wet clover and we wandered arm in arm up the hill slopes to the house, the stallion unquestioningly obedient trailing behind, his ebony back dappled with fallen blossoms. On the hill slopes to the house, sheep, their wooly bodies dim, golden blurs in the early night, fed on the wet lawns, looking as pale and unsubstantial as mist. We did not, as others, more self-conscious creatures of civilization, might have done: envied them their peace. We possessed, in the mystical magic of this most wondrous night, a sort of peace which was ours, alone . . .

CHAPTER TWO

That summer was the happiest of my life. God, or fate, or whatever it was, had granted me this one respite out of all my life of enduring agony, and I will never expect another. With Dany Buck I had my share of ecstasy and I am not so foolish as to believe that I might ever have it again with someone else. This sort of bittersweet happiness comes to some people once in a lifetime—never twice—for some, never. I sorrow for those who have never known it.

I, now that I had Dany (rather, that he had me), followed his every step. I savored every thrill of the knowledge and, just to look at him as he labored in the bright sun in the fields, the powerful arms bulging and strutted with veins, stomach muscle rippling as he lifted sacks of feed, as he thrust downward on the plowhandles . . . in any task he was given, my eyes were bound to him, drinking my fill of his dark beauty and his moody somberness. And, as I became his second shadow, I learned everything my senses could

tell me about him and and thrilled at the knowledge. I could detect his odor above and with the rich odor of the foaming pails of milk at milking time. I could sense his aroma through that of the hay, stored in the barn from last fall which also held a suggestion of the peppery fragrance of moldy fodder; I delighted in his gentle touch with the ewes at lambing-time in the

grass, dew-drenched, and heavy with muck and half-eaten melons. My eyes caressed his dark magnificence as he shovelled the manure from the stalls and washed down the concrete flooring with buckets of lye water; I could find his smell amid the smell of the horse we rode to the house from the fields at dusk and, most of all, I loved the smell of his pipe when we sat on the wooden rails of the fence at night, talking until it was time for supper.

There was about Dany, that which I have not experienced in anyone I met after him, a power—a deep, dark masculinity which made him all the more alluring, the more captivating, the more desirable. He was like my father's farm . . . rich with old scents, strong and dark of heart, like the earth and fearsome as the somber clouds which roiled and scudded over the hills when the winter's storms loosed their fury. But, too, he was so comforting to my eager hunger—comforting as the summer twilights, the stars, the whip-poor-wills fifing their calls from the dark woods; he was as warm and glowing as the house under the trees after nightfall with its golden eyes, alight with the oil lamps in the rooms, gazing bravely into the dark. He gave me a sense of security akin to that of

seeing mother, moving deftly in the light of the kitchen, preparing supper or papa, seated in his favorite rocker reading the evening paper. Dany was all these things to me, though I did not know it then. I did not sense these things then—as often the very young do not recognize these things about kin and home until years later, when they're old and look back at all they have left behind them: like gold which has

slipped through their unknowing, heedless fingers. I know this must come, this belated knowledge of the richness of being a child, because the passing years make it bear in upon me the more poignantly and with a greater sense of sorrowing loss.

Dany was the burning-glass through which all this focussed because he was essential to me, as were all the things which surrounded my life then; and because he loved the place as I loved it and loved me—although we never spoke the word nor spent words in exploring our relationship. We accepted it as natural—took it for granted—a physical thing which we must have, each of the other, in order to satisfy ourselves. We took it whenever we could steal away, to be alone, to become one in the fusion of our spirits and our bodies, and, thereafter, bask in the satisfaction of it.

Yes, Dany loved the place as much as I and he would go out on a night, me tagging at his heels, and stand with hands in back pockets, looking at the fields—the growing corn all silver in the moonlight. Then he seemed to eat and drink the farm, devouring it with his eyes.

He would look at me this same way when desire

snuggled in the bulge of his tight pants—and I never refused him, once. I realize, long since, how much he hurt me with his fierce hunger but no matter, then . . . I always gave myself to him when the longing was upon him. It was not only the look, there was a ritual of words; and I would always know . . .

"Let's walk down to the pond and chunk the tadpoles," he might suggest, taking his pipe out of his mouth so he could talk clearly; or, "Bru, fetch your

papa's rifle and we'll kill a squirrel for supper," or "I heard a hen cackling in the hay-loft this morning—bet she's left us an egg, if we go look . . ."

I would always know. Always, it was something trivial, some casual suggestion of something to do which he would advance as an excuse and my heart would leap with anticipation of the rapture which I knew would follow his whim of words. I used to lie abed at nights and gloat to myself over how we fooled my folks. However, the fooling was not so complete as I, in my youthful ignorance, believed.

"You're seeing too much of Dany," my mother said to me one evening when the two of us were rinsing blackberries for preserves. We were on the back porch and it was just before dark—light enough still to see—but the warning of quick nightfall was upon the hills. Dany was bringing the harnessed horse in from the fields and my mother eyed him curiously as he skirted the plowed rows and headed the horse toward the barn, his startlingly beautiful figure a glowing silhouette against the land.

My heart leaped into my throat at her words but I

tried to turn to their consideration with a casual interest.

"But, there's no one else to see," I protested, with truth. Our nearest neighbor was a mile away and their only child was a deaf-mute old maid.

"But Dany is a hired hand, Bru," she persisted, her eyes dropping back to the berries as Dany was lost to view inside the cavernous shadows of the barn. (How I wished I were in there with him!) "If you go on keeping company with him too much, you'll turn out

to be as ignorant as he."

A sharp rasp of irritation scraped through me at her downgrading of Dany to my face and I sought, shyly, to answer in his defense.

"Dany's not ignorant, Mama. Working in the fields doesn't make him ignorant. Why—he could be smart if only he had a chance to go to school. Hired hand or not, I like Dany."

I looked dismally into the pan of berries and saw my woebegone face in the still water. If only the world knew—as I knew—how fine Dany really was!

My mother glanced up at me, her brow laced with delicate wrinkles of thought but her eyes were wickedly kind.

"I didn't mean not to like the man, Bru. Just—just, well, don't pick up any of his ways."

My heart tripped and leaped up into my throat.

"What ways?" I asked, terror beginning to pulse in my belly.

"Oh, Bru . . . you know—common ways. He's—well, Dany's not worldly. He's not schooled. I realize there

are no other boys or girls your age close by you might be with in school holidays, but Dany Buck is older than you and a—a servant." She hesitated a little at the last words.

It made me furious.

"He's not a servant!"

"Alright, Bru—in a sense, he's not," she said, smoothly rearranging her words as she noticed the indignation, plain on my face. "But, nevertheless, beneath you and, from the family standpoint, it is not good—does not look well—for you to associate so

openly and so much with a man we have hired to work our fields."

My hands clenched convulsively beneath the water in the pan, berries crushing to squeeze through my fingers in my anger. I wanted to tell her, in no uncertain words, that Dany was as good as we. Beneath us, indeed! I sat for a moment, furious, dumb, with my mind suddenly tumbling with visions of his wonderful body over mine, his smooth skin slipping over mine, his hot lips on mine, his powerful buttocks and thighs driving into me the nectar from his darkly-fleeced crotch—the essence of his dark, primeval beauty. How wonderful he was, compared to them —compared to anyone I had ever known, for that matter! I closed my ears and my mind as she went on and on about the importance of the family name, the significance of family importance, respectability, superiority, and shucked up the entire bitter sheaf with the sour string of words: " . . . and what would the neighbors think?"

To hell with the neighbors!

Mine had been, mostly a lonely life, with no one of my age save my schoolfellows, in season, to mingle with; no one to talk to but my father and mother. Like all teen-age boys, I needed someone to grow up with, someone I could confide in, someone who could discuss with me the things—the many things—about which I was curious and suggest answers to the myriad questions which continually rose to the surface of my mind, to race around like the skip-jacks on the pond. I had come to the point where life was contributing much that was disturbing to me, both in mind and

body and I sorely needed a fellow-sufferer to reassure me that, in my distress, I was not alone.

And Dany, especially since that earth-shaking night of sex with him at the pond, had become a godsend. Dany, of all the people I knew, understood me and his mammoth existence filled the empty maw in my life to overflowing. He was the answer to the problem which had gnawed at me since puberty. And, I realized, all the wisdom in the world could not have taught me, nor lighted the obscure corners and niches of the itching, torturing emergence of sex in my consciousness. Not that Dany was possessed of any worldly wisdom on the subject, it was that his physical possession of me had opened some inward, instinctive spring of awareness to reassure me that, in the world, there were others like me. The hard, hair-coarsened thighs rubbing against mine had told me more than all the books I might have read on the subject. His hungry lips, sucking at mine, his work-roughened hands and

toil-hardened arms about my shoulders had lowered the lantern into the well, had released an aura of light in the center of my dark world of puzzlement and obfuscation. And now the blow was falling as I both cringed and rebelled . . . I was not to see Dany!

Lifting my head slowly, I gazed sadly across the horizon and watched him come out of the barn. He busied himself, fondling and playing with the baby lambs which huddled in one corner of the barnyard fence and I could feel the tears stinging at the backs of my eyes. Dany had such a way with the animals! And I–I knew the touch of those hands; knew how he could conquer or beguile with a stroke, a caress; knew

the surrender to which my own body eagerly crowded, yearning to surrender itself under the touch of those same hands. And now–all this was being spoiled and ruined for me.

"You must be kind but firm with servants," my mother continued in her persuasive way, making me hate her as she spoke, "or they will take advantage of you. You are yet very young, Bru, and it is only natural that you should be influenced by someone who is older, even though he be without learning–unlettered."

Again my anger boiled within me at the superior attitude she took toward the most important thing in my life.

"Dany's always been good to me," I protested, feeling the hot tears escape my control and well into my eyes.

"Kindness is not always a virtue," she insisted, laying a hand on mine. "Some day you will realize that Dany Buck is only lonely and you're someone for him to talk to. Through that talk, you'll likely pick up things a boy your age shouldn't hear. You'll learn those things soon enough, as it is, without an older man's help. Be friendly with him, but aloof."

"And let him do what he is paid to do," my father put in, coming onto the porch just then, the evening paper in his hands. He took a long-sided view of the matter. "You follow the man up and down every row he plows. You watch him at the milking. You're forever under his heels, worse than a hound. How can the man work with you hanging onto his every word, every breath, every move, like a wet wash hanging on

the line? How can he do a day's work for a day's pay if he's got to watch where he's going to keep from trampling you underfoot—why it would wear me to a frazzle."

And so, my world ended.

Almost.

Though I had never taken the work of the farm seriously, realizing that Dany Buck and his parents were there for the purpose of doing that work, I knew that if I was to continue to see Dany in the days which lay ahead, I would have to make myself useful. Nothing was too great a price to me to keep hold of at least some small part of my world, which turned on Dany Buck. And so, the farm became of absorbing interest to me. I labored like a titan—agreed that the measure of me was somewhat less than that—but I worked

with a vengeance and a will and a quiet desperation. Both my mother and father noted, warily, my new interest in the place and to earn their belief in the sincerity of my interest, I constantly plied them with questions and started discussions of everything around and upon the land. I learned to milk, to gear the horses, shear the sheep, cut rails, pick cotton, saw firewood, feed, cull, prune, plant, plow and harvest. Each day, though, the labor brought its instant of golden reward for either by chance or design I would know a flash of ecstasy as our hands might touch, our shoulders rub as we lifted together or his hard, dark body would brush against mine as we moved to our toil, perspiring in the heat of the sun on our labors and constantly raising the incandescence of our love. Silently I labored—and loved.

There were other moments, too, far more exciting moments, filled with the whirring, electric thrill of the stolen moments when, far from the house, or watering the horses, or chipping wood, my hand would steal to his body, inciting Dany to take hold of me quickly, intensely and plant his lips firmly on mine. Then we would fall to the soft grass, to take the stolen moment for all its worth to us and, to me, it was worth the world!

It was wonderful to steal, to rob our work of one precious, intoxicating moment and take our fill, each of the other. It was a reckless, exciting thing, electrifying as being thieves in the night, stealing away from the house when my parents were asleep to find Dany's waiting arms in the darkness. Then we would speed

silently through the night, to pull our naked bodies together, lying close in dew-drenched meadows, almost beneath the hooves of cows and sheep. Nudging out a cave in the corn ricks, Dany would pull me quickly in and, stripping off my pants, would turn me in his hands like a baby, filling my body with precious pain. In the dense woods, where leaf and limb wove a delicate lattice-work in which to conceal ourselves and where we groped for each other, doing what we must do before we were missed and must return to the drab, common world of serfdom and unceasing toil.

I would have, gladly, labored twenty-three yearning hours a day if, through that awesome yearning, I could have him on the twenty-fourth. Dany was my pay. He was my reward for the long hours of toil. He was my medal for the wounds of blistered hands, for the harshness of calloused palms, for the burning sun

and wind on my face and body. He was the remuneration for the sleepless nights, when my body was so weary and so drenched with fatigue I could barely move one foot ahead of the other. I was a slave to his love, his sex. I was addicted to his erect hunger, to that savagely dark area of his loins, to the primitive passion with which he took his fill of me, with which he brutalized me, with which he caressed me with the full measure of his unknowing cruelty which, for all its violence, was more tender, more loving in its touch than living fur and thistledown.

Dany's personality – especially his personality of sex–was stronger, far, than mine and his strength drew me to him, pulled me like birds speed toward

mountains in the distance, binding me to him in a strange, indescribable way. His very being pulled at mine like a calf at udder and, even when I was not with him, I was thinking about him. I saw his body in my daydreams, in my sleeping fantasies where, most often my dreams were of him. My mind never loosed its grasp on his image for an instant. He was always there, always lodged within it, always so firmly entangled within my conscious mind—his dark, brooding, sullen manner so physically dominant, so much of nature and earth and things I cannot describe and will never comprehend—that my head could not relax its hold of him. It was if we both were stricken with a kind of dumb madness, with the penance of wracking, endless labor in the burning sun, sweat blinding us, almost as though we were enveloped in a cloud of steam. Then I would see upon his features the fixed expression of one under a curse; the wavering face

looking at me through the heat of hell. In this frenzy, often, the thought of sex would spring in our minds and our loins, automatically. As though we could read each other's minds, we would contrive to move our labors to some other, some dark place where he would hover over me like some dark, savage animal . . . rearing taller, more fearsome with his steel-muscled back to the dark, concealing woods . . . and then I would feel him, knowing long beforehand how it was going to feel, to ache, but never relenting—oh, by the gods,—never! And, afterwards, in our hiding, wherever we were, he would fold me into the huge, sinewy arms and fairly drown me in the flood of his kisses.

He was a savage, and I brought out the savage in him; siphoned off the essence of his physical masculinity, drew from him those wondrous qualities—the things he was best at. And he loved to mount me—Oh! how he loved it. I don't think he could have passed a day without getting me off somewhere it was safe and impaling my arched body to pound against me until he was satisfied. It all happened so often, the actual sexual struggles—together with my continual dreams of his sex—that I was drugged on him. So drugged and sodden I could think of nothing else. And I secretly dreamed of and yearned for a time when Dany and I might live together—might sleep together every night (in all our frenzied time together we had never been able to do this) and writhe in sex as often and as long as we were able. All that seemed remote and unattainable, too far off, an impossibility which could have driven me mad for the sheer hunger brought on by thinking about it and I constantly

thrust it from my mind. But then, miraculously, came the opportunity which arrived in the late summer.

My mother's sister—Aunt Roxie, who lived in Kosciusko—died, and she and papa went there to attend the funeral. It was a trip which spanned four days, since they had to travel dirt roads in a 1932 Packard for over a hundred miles. The sad necessity threw me into a frenzy of happiness—I felt as though I'd just been granted the key to paradise. I asked Dany to stay in the big house with me and they were the most glorious four days and nights of my whole life. We prepared our own meals—like man and wife—and

each night, after supper, Dany would sit in the living room rocker in his worn blue-jeans and white socks and smoke his pipe until it was bedtime. I would watch him from the kitchen the while I washed the dishes and cleaned up, noticing how the light of the kerosene wicks flooded his face with gold; flowed over his smooth, brown hair, tumbling over his forehead like bangs; and splashed the naked, hard contours of his chest and arms. He was like the naked god on Papa's golden coin and I loved him so much it hurt deep inside me whenever I thought of him. It still hurts, after so many other hurts, after all these wasted years . . .

We would strip early and go to bed, the silver light of the moon sifting in over the white sheets, almost like the light of day. I would lie, silently, admiring the magnificence of his naked body while he finished the tobacco remaining in his pipe. When he had drawn the coals to extinction, he would lay the pipe aside, with a contented sigh. It was during these four nights

that I really began to explore his magnificent body for the first time, for there was no hurry, no anxiety generated by the danger of being discovered. As my hands wandered, my eyes, hungrily, drank in every, last portion of his dark beauty. And, as I studied him and, in silence, admired the beauty of his being, his body surrendered to me and my whims while he enjoyed me and his pipe, and I truly realized the great beauty of his person—his body as a body and not as an engine or instrument of sex. His belly lay flat, corded with tight rounds of muscle, like a wash-board,

without one ounce of excess flesh. His entire body supported no superfluous substance—he was totally hard muscle and smooth, tight skin. The almost-black growth of tight, curling hair began at his navel and ran wild to his crotch, some of the strands four and five inches in length, curled into ringlets and as thick as wool on a sheep's back. Here my fingers would stray, fingering the minute hairs along his navel and then hide themselves in the thick jungle where his enormous thighs began. I would lift his limp organ and study it, awed at the great size of it, a little shy and timid at its gargantuan dimension. The head, I marvelled at, thrusting out from its sheath of wrinkled skin, as big and as fairly-shaped as a purple plum . . . but of a size far too great to be found on any tree in any orchard of which I knew. The corded veins were as thick as my little finger, following the great length of the organ, back to his groin. Upon sliding my fingers about its base and squeezing, I could feel its resisting sponginess immediately begin to harden with a rigidity which made every nerve in my body shiver

and jingle.

Years before, I vividly remembered at such times, how I would admire the great masculinity of the stallion in the pasture or in his barn-stall. Often, after he had flooded the floor with his urine, his great organ would unfold, lowering like a great cable to slap upward against his belly as he siphoned the remaining drops from it. That massive shaft, so long and savage, with its rounded head and the bulge of veins along its length, would affect me so profoundly that I shook all

over. The tight dance of his stones in their black sac as the great beast moved and stamped, left me breathless. And there was this about Dany Buck—that savage something of the animal—that primeval beauty of flesh, strength and power which I could not resist. It was like taking the whole of life into your own, two hands, of holding all the power in the world, of touching something so mysterious, so overwhelming, that your senses reeled—you were rapt, awed by something so utterly provocative, so alarmingly real, so dangerously charged with power you wanted to convulse in the presence of its existence. Holding it then—once you sensed this captivating sensation, was not enough. You had to feel its overwhelming force within you; to become charged by its potential; to challenge its great power. You had to know for yourself, first hand, if it was as dangerous, as awesomely powerful as it appeared. You had to know if its strange shape desired you as you desired it—to realize in its blind groping the wild hunger it sensed within itself. Its very aroma—which intoxicated me—was a thing to raid the mind, make you feel faint. You will it

to attack you, to pierce you, to bury itself within you, deep, still deeper than you know you are and, as it enters you, dark now in the warm folds of your flesh, you see it working, in your mind, see its savage, purple head swell from its own wanton passion, see it seek out the cave in which it will disappear like a serpent sliding on its veined belly, blindly searching out your passion in the dark halls of your body. All this you see with your mind and you glory in the

seeing as, in seeing, you feel the pain its enormous power drives through every blood-shot vein, every tendon and every nerve; like lightning, shooting through your twitching body, invading it with tongues of fire and bolts of pain.

And so, it was these vital, electrifying moments of ecstasy which delighted my explorations of Dany on the four, glorious nights through which I really saw and realized for the first time—truly realized—how savage he was and, by virtue of that innate savagery, how darkly, compellingly beautiful. He conquered me. With his hard masculinity, he pinioned me like a butterfly caught on a thorn and I was helpless and loved my helplessness. No woman could have known that of him nor could she have been so thrilled by his physical aptitudes as I, for no woman understands nor appreciates the true value of a man's sexual beauty. She does not look for these things in a man, therefore she does not find them. She does not know what, when a man goes to his haunches and invades her, fearfully, like a dark cloud shooting lightning strokes of flame, that she is in the presence of a god, that she is feeling the involvement with a god, that she is being en-

shrouded in a feeling and a sensation which is escaped from the gods, by some awesome mischief, to invest humans. She, being a woman, can never know this. Only with another man can a man gauge the dimension of the male being because a woman does not possess this perception of the male creature; does not and cannot fathom the limitless savagery of the male. There is within her, the lack of the comprehension

necessary to perceive this, something totally outside her nature. In order to feel, we must first know what feeling is—it is like being burned, the very first time. Thereafter, you know what a burn feels like. Unless we have been hurt by the fire, we cannot know the effect it may have upon others; thus a woman, who is no part male, cannot and can never gauge the idigenous ferocity which is so cunningly mingled and hidden with tenderness in the opposite sex. She may guess, she may imagine, but she will never—really—know. But I knew!

Of course, *then* I knew none of these things, even though I had developed a sensitive insight about people at an early age, and knew only the rudiments, the characteristics basic to my desire and my delight. I had never encountered sex with anyone, male nor female, except Dany Buck and it was from him and him only, that I could and did draw conclusions about life, about sex and about the male gender as a whole. Throughout my life, and I still do, I would fathom other men through my impression, my love for him. He became the pattern, the standard of my sexual desires; the image I would constantly seek out in other men and he left such an impression on me that no other

type, however handsome or how richly endowed wi
male beauty, would or could satisfy me. And becau
he was utterly masculine, rugged to the degree
savagery, it was all the more difficult for me to fi
any facsimile of him. It was, actually, impossible, b
my heart hoped, ever, one might be.

He gave me much, but he unknowingly took m

for he spoiled me for other men because I could neve
find his counterpart and he eroded, completely any
desire I might have had for women.

Yet, at that time, he was the world and I but a
medium, awed by his magnificence, his gigantic hold
on my life. He was everything I wanted, and would
ever want, and I had him—and so, lived in a paradise
which he created.

The paradise was short-lived—perhaps the brief
period of its life-span is what makes any paradise,
initially. We catch the joy of it fleetingly, as the time
speeds past us like the brass rings on a merry-go-
round. We reach out with finger-tips which graze the
moments or the rings, with a faint contact . . . and
then, they are flung behind us in the uncontrolled
spiral of our lives, like a signpost seen from a train-
window.

Papa caught us.

Dany and I were in the barn, late one evening,
laying straw on the concrete so that the cow-drop-
pings would be easier to clean next morning. This was
something we did every night. While we were spread-
ing the straw, Dany had to relieve himself and, while
he had the great organ out of his jeans, I was pos-
sessed with an urge to take it in my fingers and feel it.

Always, when it was limp, it hung from his black
thicket an appalling length, huge and thick, and dan-
gling like the stallion's when he had finished urinating,
and stood idle, relishing the relief. Dany looked at me
with a faint, heated smile on his face and in his eyes

as I took hold of him, longingly. I loved to watch it rise under my touch and, wrapping my hand about it, I moved it back and forth several times to make him react.

It was at that moment Papa walked in. He never ventured from the house so far as the barn, but that accursed evening, he was searching for Dany to give him instructions about the alignment of a new rail fence which was to be built and he came upon us when we were totally unaware.

My hand fell, automatically to my side. Dany, thinking fast, gave his organ a shake as though he'd just finished relieving himself and stuffed it back into his jeans. Papa just stood, frozen in his tracks. He looked then at Dany—and to me—with an almost mocking expression and I felt terror fasten on my vitals. I was more frightened than I had ever been in my life. I realized, as I collapsed inwardly with a draining faintness, that he had seen us. Without saying a word, he walked out of the barn.

Sheepishly, I looked up at Dany and he, moodily, looked at me. We were struck dumb and momentarily insensible to the starkness of the reality. Like a knife cut which, for a moment gives a sting of insensibility before the real agony erupts, so did we sense the blow but fail to feel the awesome pain which would surely follow. I knew Papa—so did Dany—and our future

looked grim. Melting into Dany's outstretched arms, began to cry, openly, for at that moment I feared mo for him than for myself.

"He'll fire you Dany. Papa'll make you leave and I never see you again—never!"

"We'll think of something. Bu

ing to comfort me, the huge, bronze arms lifting m
warmly to him. "Besides we weren't doing nothing
really."

Whatever he saw, it was enough. Whatever his lac
in other directions, Papa had imagination and he wa
from the Greek heritage which, in such star-crosse
scenes, could seek in only the very direction to pillor
Dany and me. Then, too, he took with this conclusion
his final revenge on Mama—to hurt her by hurtin
me. I had thought, in my naive confusion, he woul
fire Dany and send the Buck family packing, but
misjudged Papa's grasp of the realities. He was to
practical to divorce the essential importance of Dan
from the farm. So, he ran me away from home
instead.

"If you make that boy leave home, put him out i
the cold with no place to go, no food, no job, n
nothing, then I'll leave you, Brutus; as there is a Goo
in heaven, I'll leave you and never come back," m
mother cried. It was after the evening meal and w
threshed the whole, bitter mess out in the living room
I was crimson with shame and humiliation that Mama
had to know what I was doing with Dany. I could no
look her straight in the eye. In fact, I was mortified
because sex was one question we never explored
never discussed between the three of us. My mothe

was so reserved that such things as sex and childbirth
and pregnancies were screened away from her—
guarded as secrets. When Papa and I talked of breed-
ing the heifers of turning the stallion in with the mares

when they were in heat, we always retreated to the porch or to the yard—out of Mama's hearing—for such discussions. So far as I knew, my mother never was conscious that cows ever calved, sheep ever yewed, mares ever foaled—or even that chickens laid eggs. Now to my shocked and heated shame and disgrace, this awful, unspeakable thing was discussed, in the open, before her.

And, beneath my shame, I still loved Dany Buck to distraction and I wondered what he was doing at this moment; wondered if he felt the shame and disgrace as I felt it; and if he felt as alone and desolate in our plight as I. Of course, I never considered at that time —nor did I have the sense to see beyond my love for him and his sex—that the plight was mine, and mine alone. It was I who was to suffer from our carnal trysts and not Dany. It was my life which would suddenly be wrested from its course, from its security and shelter, from the ecstasy we had shared together—not his life. He would go on, as before, missing me perhaps, but nevertheless go on as before, tending the farm, doing his work, complying with the same demands my father had placed on him before, as early as I could remember.

Later, when I considered it all in the light of retrospect and wider and far more bitter experience, I blamed my mother's stifling love for my unhappiness; blamed, also, my father's blind hatred, his consuming

selfishness—but it was Dany Buck, and Dany Buck, alone, who set me upon the road that dark night; alone on the turnpike to my shadowy and tragic end.

"He can stay at Blaize's—at the carpet shop in New Orleans," my father countered, calling my mother's bluff of leaving him if he ran me away from home.

I cringed under this decision; this fate to which he sentenced me in the doleful situation of my life and youth. Blaize Salario was Papa's nephew and resided in New Orleans, in the famous French market, selling imported Turkish carpets and oriental brass-ware. I had seen him but one time—and that was when I was about eight years old and he paid papa a visit for the purpose of collecting some money which was owed him. I did not like him, immediately and from the very first. He was a huge man, gross and be-whiskered as a genii from the Arabian Nights, and he delighted in pinching me, in a manner which set my teeth on edge, frustrated and angered me. I wanted, desperately, to protest—to cry out that I wouldn't stay with that fat so-and-so—but my mother answered for me.

"Bru—Bru ain't gonna stay with that despicable nephew of yours . . . not over my dead body. He ain't, Brutus, and you make up your mind to it, he just ain't!" Then she added: "Could I help it if I coddled him too much, could I help it if I loved him too much . . . and made him the way he is?"

Mama's voice clung to my heart like the trail of cotton the trucks leave clings the roadside on the way to the gin. She had such a plaintive voice, such a soft voice. Everything she said seemed to mean a great deal more than the words she spoke—like she was going a

long way down a black passage with a hand held out

to the side to guide her, and no light in her lamp. Everything she said, though it might not have held anything merry in it, like then, she smiled a bit, like when you hurt yourself and won't show it. A very grievous smile it was, and always on her lips. And, when Papa said that I would go to his nephew's shop in New Orleans, whether she left him or not, or if he had to kill her, if need be, Mama stood by the living room center table saying: "Oh dunna, Brutus. Hold thy spoiler's hand, Brutus," and all the while the little smile was on her lips and the soft voice wove the ropes that bound my father's hands and left him standing before her, powerless to enforce the now-empty threat which marked his mean lips.

Oh! my poor mother! My poor, despairing mother! Will there be another world, dear soul, where I may see you once again and atone for the wrong my recklessness did to you?

But, whatever the crime and its punishment, the trial was over for Papa always had the last word, even if he had not the heart to make his great-worded, empty threats come to life. But Mama left him, cut herself away from the farm, which she loved only a little less than she loved me, and took with her only the sordid memories which must have surfaced over the pleasure she'd know in her years on the land—the tasteless years with my father and her only child's descent into a limbo too deep and too involved for her complete understanding.

I packed a small suitcase—actually a black leather medicine kit which had belonged to Mama's father—

and went to the back door to depart from

She was there, waiting, to thrust two twenty doll
bills into my hand, a hand which, like my body, sho
as with the palsy.

"Write to me at my sister Maybelle's in Atta
County," she pleaded in her soft voice and with h
small smile, kissing me on the cheek.

"Oh Mama!" I cried, the guilt rising in me, stiflin
burning, "don't go and destroy your own life, yo
own happiness, just because I've been a great fool!"

"Na—hush," she soothed, fingers holding m
shoulders firmly, "it weren't your fault. I should hav
kept a quicker eye. Then she sighed, in weariness an
in the now-pallid light form the oil lamps, suddenl
and strangely old, ancient in the night. "The time
long past due, Bru. It was years ago I should have le
the man."

And so I left her, then, clutching the bills she'
given me, left her crying at the kitchen door, my ow
eyes flooded as I made my way down between th
dark fields. Dany stood waiting, his silhouette like
wondrous giant against the star-stained sky and I fel
the power of him then, more than any other time; fel
the awe of his presence and the pressure of his being
there in the night. He swept me into his arms and we
stood, holding each other close, actually, for the last
time in our lives, although I did not know it then.
Youth is resilient and defeat is impossible in the
myriad, eventual chances which stretch ahead. In my
shock and confusion and guilt and despair, I knew that
it would only take time for me to get back to him,
somehow—get him back for my own, please heaven—

how, I did not know. For this disastrous moment, I could only cling to him, counting the seconds as I felt his love seep into me like a warm, spring rain and hating the dread I felt for the moment when I must say good-bye.

"I heard your papa giving you hell," he muttered, stroking my dark hair back from my forehead. "I sickened at the words in the man's mouth—and my hardest wish was to kill him."

"Oh, Dany," I sobbed into the massive, hard chest, "what am I going to do—what will happen to us?"

He stuck a wad of bills into my jacket pocket.

"When you get to a stopping-place, write, little Bru, and I'll send you more if you need it. Someday . . . someday when the time is come right for us, I'll make my way to you.

I looked at the big wad of bills, in protest.

"Dany—I can't take this—your life's savings. I won't do it—you've worked too hard . . ."

I could see the picture of him bending in the hard light of the blistering sun, the double-bitted axe in his hands as he cut and split the tough oak for fence-rails, and the thought of the picture sickened me to the marrow. I could split rails, myself, hoe, plow, lift and dig until my body ached, my fingers bled and my palms cal-like the horny hoof of a sheep, but I could not endure the sight of him doing it, even in my treacherous mind's eye. He was too fine, too utterly and devastatingly dear to me to be forced to stoop to such menial tasks forever. And here was he, offering me the hard-earned rewards of his sweating toil and his fatigue at every new-come dusk.

I handed the roll of bills back to him.

"Ah, Bru," he tried to tease, the calloused h pushing mine away, "it's not the life's savings you of—it's only fifty—so take it. If you don't, I'll myself. I couldn't stand the worry. It'll be enoug tide you over to a job . . ."

At that, I put the bills back in my pocket promised I would repay it as soon as I found work.

Then, it was time to go. At that moment, I wan him more than I had ever wanted anything in whole life. And I clung to him, there in the star road between the fields, the sheep like ghostly shap half-seen in the dark, feeding on either side of How I loved him, and how desperately I needed hi then.

I knew then, as I have come to know since, that th love between two men is deeper, more powerfu more enduring than love between a man and a wom an. For if a man is more turbulent and violent in hi passions—and he is—then how double-much is the result when two men are met and joined with that powerful fire. Physically, so powerful, then so much more powerful in the spirit and the loving. There is no breaking them apart, and we were like huge magnets set against each other—a force holding us greater than the power we needed or had, to pull us apart. Yet, somehow, we slackened our grip, each on the other, and he walked with me through the pasture road to where the old dirt road—now Interstate Highway Forty-nine—wound its path of somber foreboding toward New Orleans. We walked together without a word passing between us; like two minds caught in a

spell of silence. And when we reached the rail fence which marked the end of Papa's farm, I jerked away and ran—ran with all the might of my legs—ran because I could not say good-bye. Never could I say goodbye to Dany Buck, my father's cowman-shepherd.

I slowed to a fast walk up the dark hill, not daring to look back, not trusting my faulty courage if I should see him standing there in the hollow, lit by the moonbeams with a god-like halo, surrounded by his beautiful sheep. But when I crested the hill and felt it wall me away from my home, somehow I sensed it was forever, and I began to cry, the terrible weeping of disaster sensed but not cleanly known. And I thought how terrible it is that people can hurt you so much—"kill your soul" as one of my silly schoolmates delighted in saying—and, in the destruction of you, mean nothing by it. I thought, also desperately, how silly it was to throw three people into separate ways, spreading farther and farther apart and in different directions, wrecking a way of life for the people who had made it, simply because I had laid my hands on another man's member . . .

CHAPTER THREE

New Orleans, Louisiana's Crescent City, lies upon a table-flat stretch of land, between the moats of the Mississippi River and Lake Pontchartrain. It is home to 655,000 people and lies below sea level, though some 107 miles north of the Gulf of Mexico. It has to be pumped free of the incessant infiltration of water by the labors of machines which work perpetually to keep the water level from drowning the city. New Orleans is built on bales of cotton, due to the constant seepage, and its streets, literally, roll like rubber when heavy trucks rumble over them, laden with the mammoth loads of goods which flow through the city, both to and from the gullets of the ocean-going ships which clog its docks.

Unique in North America is the French Quarter—the Vieux Carre—where some seventy square blocks retain the 18th and 19th century remains of the intermingled architecture left by the French and Spanish who once dominated New Orleans. When the truck-driver, bringing in a load of watermelon and cantaloupe for the French Market, dropped me off before the Cafe DeMonde on Decatur Street, I felt as alien as though I'd just walked off a ship in another, foreign land.

It was late evening and though Papa's nephew,

Blaize, lived but a short distance east on Decatur, I

was in no hurry to see a man whom I already abhorred. I was weary from the long, rough ride in the truck cab and I wanted to eat and freshen up before I began the sentence, pronounced by my father. With my black bag, I crossed the street and went into Jackson Square to sit on one of the metal benches while I relaxed and restored myself in preparation to doing Papa's will. The park, though strange to me, I thought a very beautiful expanse with its foliage: the palms, live oaks and spanish dagger. While numbers of people moved along its gray, paved walks and milled about at the foot of an enormous statue of Andrew Jackson, the atmosphere, despite their incessant motion, seemed utterly serene.

The pigeons made a marshalling-point of the great figure of Jackson, astride a rearing charger, coming to rest on the General's outstretched hand and arm, his plumed hat and the horse's mane and the metal had long since taken on the bright green shade of young mint from the droppings and the constantly altering states of sun and rain in the semi-tropical climate. However, the solid bulk of the statue against the reddening sky and the spires of St. Louis' Cathedral facing Chartres Street, afforded me a measure of courage which I badly needed. No denying I was nervous and ill-at-ease in such surroundings. I had lived all my life on a farm and I could not help feeling somewhat hostile at the constant presence of numbers of people all about. Deep within me, I had the urge to lash at fate for putting me here. I longed, with a physical pain, for Dan's presence and the assurance it gave me.

for Dany's presence and the [illegible]
For the first time, I was sick for my home and my

mother's affection—even the stifling love she poured upon me. Tears, which I could not stem, suddenly welled into my eyes and, blinking them back, I faced the fact I'd reached the end of my journey and, finally, was confronted with the harsh reality of my predicament. The sick feeling grew in my belly. I had ninety dollars stuffed away at the bottom of my bag—all that stood between me and starvation. The amount seemed enormous to me (I had never handled money) but, through some instinctive sense, it seemed not nearly so great as what appeared to be the eternity of time which I faced.

I had little hope of staying with Blaize—and no desire to do so, but I had decided to look in on him, just in case, and to satisfy the demands of Papa. I had not been able to grasp, at this point, that the bonds between him and Mama were severed, never to be restored—nor could I fully grasp that I was utterly alone in the world, to stand or fall by myself—alone. Like most young, I had taken the security of my life with my family for granted: the serenity and security of my comfortable life on the farm. Now, full in the face, the realization struck me that, sitting here in this strange city, surrounded by people, I was utterly and completely alone. I knew no one and the loneliness crowded in upon me as my mind flooded with pictures of nights gone by, with Mama busy in the back kitchen, cooking supper in the light of the oil lamps; with Papa in the living room with his paper; with the stock tucked snugly away in their stalls and yard and

fields for the night; and with Dany, sitting quietly, contentedly on the top rail of the fence, smoking his

ipe.

Now, suddenly, it all seemed millions of miles away, nstead of just two hundred, and there crowded in upon me, in all its awesome misery once more, the nowledge that I would never see any of them—or the farm—again. Sniffling with my tears, timidly and pitying myself for my plight a little, I decided to see Papa's nephew and get the matter over with.

Blaize lived at the rear of his carpet shop in a shabby room which was no bigger than the milk room of the farm and, everywhere about the place was the dishevelled of a none-too-happy, none-too-tidy bachelor establishment. Blaize, by now, was older, and much larger; his waist having totally disappeared in the grossness of his great belly and, to me, he looked as if he was miserable, grunting everytime he stooped or sat and constantly scratching at his balding head as though routing out unwanted lodgers. Although I immediately detested the sight both of him and this morbidly dark place, buried under the rolls and rolls of carpet stacked into mountains with only narrow trails to pass in between, he seemed glad enough to see me, eagerly explaining to me the duties he expected of me.

There was only one bed which was squared into the corner of the back room, canopied by a rent and tattered mosquito netting, with the additional decoration of some leaves of torn wall-paper hanging from

the ceiling. When Blaize struggled out of his pin-stripe suit and into a long and billowing night shirt, he motioned for me to climb in and sleep on the side next to the wall. Getting out of my clothes reluctantly, I

got a quick glimpse of his calloused feet with the long, dirty toe-nails and the gross body and felt like I wanted to vomit.

I didn't sleep a wink. With my body pressed tightly against the wall, as far away from Blaize as possible, I lay and thought of Dany. During the night, weary from the long trip and the fatigue of uncertainty of new places and strange faces, I drowsed only to be awakened by the weight of his mountain of flesh, probing, moving back and forth sideways against me. I turned, abruptly, and forced as much of my body as I could between the bed and the filthy wall. I remained in this cramped and uncomfortable position for the rest of the night and, next morning, I dressed hurriedly and re-packed my little black bag.

"Where do you think you're going?" Blaize demanded, gruffly, stuffing himself the while into his balloon-like trousers. "You going to quit before you start?"

"I'm getting out of this flea pen," I said, not looking in his direction because I dared not. I could, however, feel the intensity of his angry eyes upon my every move.

"What will I tell your papa?" he cried, flapping his flabby, fat arms against his sides. "Tell him his son has walked out on me—when I tried to give him a home—tried to keep him in off the streets—wanted to take

Finished with my packing, I closed the bag and straightened to look Blaize in the eye.

"Tell him I'm walking out on you—yes," I said, fighting to keep my voice steady. "You—you sloppy

moffa-dyke!" I'd heard the word somewhere from my school associates and, although I had only a vague idea of its meaning and less of its spelling, it served me to good advantage.

Blaize bellowed like one of the bulls on the farm when you prod him in the balls with a hay fork.

"The pot calling the kettle black!" he screamed, pointing a fat finger at me, a finger yellowed from the hand-rolled cigarettes he smoked endlessly. "It's all right there—there in that letter from your papa!"

I was stunned and turned to stare at where he was pointing. I saw the opened envelope amid an array of empty beer bottles and my knees, suddenly, felt like they were water. Had Papa dared to put on paper his assumptions about Dany and me and—what was even the more terrible—send the letter to this gross, this horrible man? I began to tremble with rage. That Papa would even put the name of Dany Buck before the eyes of such a one, to scorn, made the heat of helpless anger surge quickly into the back of my throat and I began to tremble. I knew, then that he had, otherwise this greasy, flabby slug would not have had the audacity to attempt the satisfaction of his lusts upon my body during the night in his soiled bed. The idea that anyone could think he could replace

Dany Buck in my affections . . . or think, because I had given myself to Dany that *he* might use me for his own, sickening pleasure . . . increased my anger and, at the same time, the feeling of sick despair which followed it.

"It's all a lie!" I said, speaking to deny everything.

"Your papa doesn't lie," Blaize returned, tartly,

snapping his finger. "You . . . and a half-nigger plow hand!"

My anger boiled over, rushing into my head to chase out any possibility of clear thinking.

"Dany Buck is not a Negro!" I cried, trying desperately to explain. Really, I wanted to lunge at him to get my fingers around his fat throat and squeeze the sordid, dirty, life out of his gross, elephant-like body. At the same time, I glanced about me for something I might use on him—to strike him and draw blood.

He put both hands on his hips, swaggering back and forth, a nasty smile on his fat, unshaven face, taunting me with his attitude, his expression and his words.

"What is he then?" he demanded, sneeringly, "a mulatto—a quadroon, maybe?"

"He—he's a—he's a Creole," I answered, the breath rushing out of my lungs. "Dany is French and Spanish!"

He laughed then, his red, too-full lips opening over the yellowed teeth—one of gold—and in the dim light of the room, in this strained illumination, he looked hideously grotesque to me. Then, having had his laugh, the ugly face sobered and he eyed me

coldly.

"You uphold him, don't you?" he demanded, his voice cutting like a knife. "You don't fool me, Brut, no, sir—you don't fool me one bit. Your papa told the truth in the letter he sent to me. That's why he sent you to me, so that I could steer you straight—so I could keep you from—ah—straying."

"Like you tried to last night?" I yelled at him, my

face feeling tight with the hot blood of anger rushing into it.

Then it was his turn to become red-faced.

"Oh, that . . ." he shrugged. "What the hell—Might as well . . ." he stopped there. Stopped and looked at me and the beaded eyes, with the almost-concealing fat lids, stared with a strange light in them. They almost glittered in the cavern-like dimness of the room. I stiffened. I had seen the identical thing in Dany's eyes, especially when he wanted sex with me—a glint of silver as a fish's belly catches the light for an instant, turning in the water. A flash—and then gone. "Might as well do it—if he did it."

I stared at him insolently, daring him to make a move.

"You'd have to kill me, first," I said, flatly, my eyes narrowed against his.

"Oh, no!" he said, casually, "not kill you, Brut. Dead bodies got no passion, Brut." He was silent for a brief time before he went on speaking. "I knew how you were—I knew you were like that long before your papa wrote me. He wasn't sending me no news. I knew about you the first time I ever saw you. You got the body for it, Brut, a body that's made for men's

pleasure—and I know."

I could stand no more of him. I had been made—was born—only for Dany's pleasure and I could no more swallow the thought of this shaking blob of a body touching me than I could fly. I gritted my teeth, grabbed my black bag and strode to the door.

"Goodbye!" I yelled, threading my way through the maze of carpet-rolls which cluttered the store, passed

the wooden box with the open cans and bottles, where we'd eaten, and went into the street.

I heard him shouting after me:

"Go on—go, then! But you'll get picked up—mark my words. You just wait and see, smart mouth. You'll get picked up, alright!"

I halted and turned for a last word:

"I'd like to see someone try and pick me up!" Then I faced about and walked away from that hell-hole as fast as I could.

How little, then, I knew. How right Blaize had been. But no power in heaven nor on earth, at that moment, could have convinced me that anyone could or would ever touch me except Dany Buck . . . my father's cowman-shepherd.

My body seethed with rage and hatred for the pompous hypocrite who called *me* names, as I hastened down Decatur Street, spurning the gray sidewalk beneath the feet of anger. Once or twice, unseeing, I bumped into other people, but never looked back, my blood a-boil and my whole consciousness up in arms. At that moment, I know, I hated Papa more than I ever did, or thought I could hate anyone. I

knew now—knew beyond any shadow of doubt—that my father knew Blaize for what he was and had sent me to his nephew for that reason. My heart sank at the unwitting harshness of his banishment. He would not let me stay at home because he suspected what had happened with Dany Buck. Yet, he threw me, like scavenger bait, into the clutches of one he knew would use my body for his own pleasure. At no time had I seen more clearly the shallow hypocrisy of my

ather than at that turbulent, agonized instant of realization.

When I came to the end of the commercial district and crossed into the Vieux Carre, I was winded, completely unnerved and suddenly assailed by loneliness and desperation. Now, there was no one I knew I could turn to and, as I slowed my hasty pace and gazed down Chartres and Decatur streets, the realization brought more foreboding. The retaining wall, the docks, the park—all alien vistas to me, were filled with people, strange and dark, intent upon their own goings and comings and not the least conscious of my distress, not the least caring for the silent cries for help which my desperation was sending out of me. The fear grew and grew inside and almost reached the peak of panic. Then, a green light changed to red and gave me a moment's respite from my walk and allowed me to get my emotions more under control. When the light changed and I could move again, I went across Decatur and, somewhat warily, up the steps into the Cafe DeMonde. Beneath the green-and-yellow striped awning spread a forest of tables cov-

ered with checked cloths. They looked inviting enough and I sat down at one near the end so I could look out across the wall to the river or to Jackson Square. I asked for coffee and doughnuts and, as I waited, I struggled to get my thoughts into some proper order; to sort them out so they'd stop driving me into a panic everytime I got into some new tangle in this jungle, with its formal paths and strange structures.

One thing I knew for true—never would I go back

to that horrid man's den, that rat's nest. I could not return home, either. What I must do, then, was find work for myself so that I might have a place to stay, food and clothes . . . and make the best of my banishment. What happened with my life, I could now see clearly, was entirely up to me because there was no one who cared (or even knew) but Dany Buck and my mother, and both might as well be across far oceans for all my chances to bask in the warmth of their familiar company again. Truly, in this moment, I realized that they were lost to me (blinking back the sudden tears which rose at the thought) and now I must shift for myself.

Work had never frighted me, in the least, and I felt enough confidence in myself and in my ability to learn, to find something which would let me earn a wage. I knew of the depression, although not quite sure what a depression was, but I had heard that jobs were scarce over the country and that families, with out them, were going on starvation. Now keenly con-

cerned with people, I began to watch them as they passed in both directions along Decatur Street before me and all looked ill-kept in dull, dark clothing, topped by faces which were plainly marked with silent depression of spirit, haunted eyes seeming always fixed on some invisible point ahead, actually looking nowhere. As the moments and the members of this nondescript horde passed, I began to feel more and more uneasy about my future and found myself glaring hatefully at them as though their presence in my world made me a part of their weariness and defeat. Loafers clung in small groups along the wa-

terfront, waiting for jobs aboard the cargo ships, bound to the docks by heavy, drooping ropes and I wondered what the big, round metal disks were for through which the ties passed. These men seemed old –older than Papa and, as I watched them, I noticed that not all of them stayed in the groups on the docks, but would move over to the iron benches in the park to vary their place of waiting. The clothing which hung on their bony frames was, mostly, pretty ragged and looked even older than the men themselves. Among them, there was not one face, which to my searching eyes, appeared young and I felt an odd sensation that my fate was casting me with what looked like an army of ragged scarecrows for the reason that I had hurt my parents (at least my mother) so unmercifully. Instinctively I loathed the cast of age upon them because there was nothing in these ancients, like with young people, which lit in me the heat of vitality and an enjoyment for living.

heat of vitality and an enjoyment for living.

The waiter brought my doughnuts and coffee, then, his dark mustached face breaking into a ready smile when I asked him how much and he, pointing to the cashier's desk informed me it was fifteen cents.

Outrageous! I thought, bitterly, remembering the money Mama and Dany had given me. The harsh realization that it would not last long at this rate, engulfed me. Ten cents for a cup of coffee!

Again, everything seemed to grip me by the throat then, making my world more difficult, more lonely and uncertain. I was on the verge of sinking into the pit of dark despair again when I noticed, looking over the rim of my coffee cup, a young boy coming through the

square. I judged him to be about my age (certainly not much older) and about my height and weight and his brisk steps caused me to follow him with interested, though weary, eyes. He glanced at the loafers with a quick glance, as though assessing them somehow, but wasted no further attention on them once he'd looked them over, raising his eyes to the Cafe again. His walk was hurried and purposeful, as though he knew exactly where he was going, and he came quickly across Decatur and mounted the steps to the Cafe.

When he drew closer, I saw that he was a good-looking boy, a riot of dark, brown curls tumbling about his head. His hair, while somewhat long and shaggy for my taste, shone in the morning light revealing glints of gold at the ends. His clothing was a khaki shirt, rather faded, and a pair of western levis which, like mine, were hide-tight. Also, like me, he was

wearing riding boots with the legs of his pants turned up but drawn down over his boot tops. Though made with the rough side of the leather out, his boots were buffed and shining in spots from long wear, while mine were black and highly polished. It seemed to me, at that point, that our attire, at least, lent us something in common and, at that thought, the depressing load of loneliness lifted. Perhaps it showed on my face or in my eyes, for as he strolled casually past my table, he cried:

"Howdy, cowpoke," the words as familiarly said as though he'd known me all my life.

I returned his greeting as he entered the enclosed portion of the cafe and disappeared from view. Short-

ly afterward, he returned with a doughnut balanced on the saucer of his coffee cup. With the agility of a circus performer, he swung one muscular leg over a chair back and sat down beside me.

"You don't mind if I join you?" he asked, although it sounded more like a statement of fact . . . and was . . . getting at once to the business of dunking his doughnut into the steaming coffee and carrying it swiftly to his girlishly-red lips.

"I need company," I answered and he took this to be his cue. We became friends, immediately. He talked a blue streak and everything he said made good sense. I mostly listened. It was plain to me from the start that he had a much wider knowledge of the world that I, fresh from the farm and I recognized there was much I did not know but was faced with the learning of if I expected to make a life for myself

in this dim-lit, borderline world of makeshift and privation.

He informed me his name was Cecil Jarreau (only he pronounced it "Sess-ul" and not, as the boy I'd known at school was called, "See-sull"). I liked the (to me) strange pronunciation of the name. Cecil told me he was from Villa Platte, right in the heart of the Cajun country, a little French settlement in that flat stretch of bayou somewhere between New Orleans and Donaldsonville.

"Papa made me join the C.C.C.'s" he went on, "but after six months I up and quit. I been in N'awleens ever since." I considered his pronunciation of the city's name and rejected it. I had, for too long, called it "Noo Awleens" to change now.

A little timidly, I told him who I was and where I was from, but tried to make it sound as though I were here by choice rather than under banishment by my father.

Carelessly flipping a sack of cigarette tobacco from his shirt pocket, he rolled one with the practised touch of a veteran, offered me one ready-rolled which I refused and cocked a sharp eye at me.

"You got a job?" he asked, knowingly. I shook my head.

"Just got here yesterday," I explained, "but I'll find one in no time."

"It ain't that easy—er—Brut," he cautioned me, lighting the neat cartridge of tobacco and leaning back in his chair to savor it. His manner was that of

one with all the time in the world and not a care to help fill it. "Jobs are scarce as all hell in this here town and every hobo in the state drifts to it—pardon me, I wasn't referring to you—but, take a look at 'em. Thicker than flies on a cow-flop."

I looked across the street to where he'd nodded and gazed despondently at the irregular pattern of dark figures, draped along the benches and wearing out the time talking to each other or just staring absently before them.

"They look like they're starving," I commented, my voice low in my throat.

"It's not that bad," he murmured, "but almost. The old ones, mostly, go through the bread line down on Dumaine Street and the younger ones—most of them winos—they make it at Goldie's Tavern on Bayou St. John."

I looked at him, seriously, a little frightened that this worldly lad knew so much and I knew nothing.

"How about you?" I asked out of my great and impatient curiosity.

"Oh, me," he returned, his blue eyes fixed on a faraway point, "I make out, pard." He swallowed hard and his eyes still didn't meet mine. "If'n you're young and you got a speck of looks, there's always a way."

"How so?" I stammered, itching to know everything at once.

His eyes found mine, then, and held them for a tense moment.

"Say, you're kinda dense, Brut. But," he pressed on, shrugging his shoulders, "you ain't got nothin' to [illegible] with your looks and your build."

worry about—not with your looks and your

I looked at him, completely puzzled.

"What's my looks and my body got to do with it?"

He shrugged again, sucking in his lower lip in a careless gesture.

"Mostly everything. You look good—you get paid for looking good and—if you can do other things—you get paid more. You follow me?"

Completely in the dark, I answered, shakily.

"Sounds easy enough to me—but who does this paying you mention?"

There was another pause before Cecil answered, a silence in which he seemed to be gauging my impatience.

"Men, mostly," he replied at last, lacing his fingers behind the curly head. "If you're luckier, sometimes women."

The light was beginning to get through the crannies

in my thick head.

"You mean—like a—a gigolo?"

His smile leaped instantly, displaying two regular rows of beautifully white teeth.

"Well, you might call it that, cowboy, but there's another name for it they use around here. Still, and everything, I could take gigolo better—it sounds a lot nicer." He was silent for another moment, then: "I don't guess it really matters what name you lay to it, just so you're there and ready with the juice when they want it."

"The juice?" I asked, puzzled again.

"Sperm, little Lord Fauntleroy—I mean your Come —your Load, man, your Load!"

—your Load, man, your Load!

"Oh!" I exclaimed, abashed at my thickness. The first thing which flashed into my thoughts was Blaize, with my own body crammed between the mountain of his fat and the dirty wall in his sleeping cell. Then I thought of Dany, thought of him holding me in his arms, making love to me; taking me in the corn-ricks, in the hay-loft, in the dark woods on the carpet of pine needles. Then I thought of someone else trying to do that—someone a total stranger to me, and I felt suddenly sick with the opposition to the idea which suddenly swelled inside me.

I looked him right in the eyes and probed for understanding.

"What makes you think I'd do that?" I asked, fast beginning to believe the entire world must be that way.

He leaned forward in his chair, put his elbows on the table before he answered, in a voice so low that no

one but me could hear him.

"They all do it—sooner or later—just like you. Here in town with no job, no place to stay, no money, no food, no home. What they gonna do? They end up sellin' their bodies!"

I gasped in the shock of the knowledge that men paid boys for such things. Cecil looked at me, his eyes filled with concern.

"Not me," I said, aghast as the visions of Dany again danced in my head, starting a trembling in my muscles. "I'll get a job . . . any kind of a job."

"Your choice," he sighed, disappointed. "But you would come in with me. We'd make the circuit to-

could come in with me. We'd make the circuit to-gether–partners in trade. I could introduce you to some of my regulars. They'd like a change now and then . . . somebody fresh and green like you. Whad-daya say, Brut?"

I shook my head, unable to look him in the eyes.

"I–I couldn't," I murmured, and it was as if I was speaking to Dany, instead of this smooth stranger, telling Dany–reassuring him–that I would always be faithful to him and to the love we had shared.

Cecil rose from his chair, tapping the table lightly with a loosely-closed fist.

"If you change your mind, Brut, look me up. I'm usually around these parts–or you can find me at the Napoleon House on Charres Street, just three blocks off the square."

"No, thanks, Cecil," I said, with finality.

"See you, sport," he concluded, breezily and went down the steps to Decatur and across to the square. I sat, watching him go on his quick, springing steps,

graceful among the plodders, eating up the space of Jackson Square with his impatient, muscular strides.

I felt as though someone had pulled a chair from beneath me, just as I sat down in it, watching him move through the square and disappear on the other side; the golden glints in his hear sparking now and then in the sun with the movements of his body. He turned by the Cathedral and went into the Vieux Carre and I wondered, numbly, if in looking after Cecil, it is a picture of myself in six months I'm really watching. I shuddered at the possibility.

May the gods spare me that!

Suddenly I thought of an old saying that Mama used to make to me, repeatedly when she was lecturing me on my behavior and it was like somebody had painted it on the wall of the Cathedral:

"Society invents the crimes that criminals commit. . . ."

CHAPTER FOUR

Long after the strange boy was gone (and I had liked him, immediately), I sat before the red-and-white checked cloth at the cafe, trying to put my jumbled, puzzling life into some sort of clear picture.

The sun, now, was about 9 o'clock high, I guessed, squinting from behind the protection of the awning at it, and the farm produce, trucked into the French Market and piled in stacks along the gallery, with its many, enormous white columns, was beginning to make itself at home in my nostrils. It was easy for me to distinguish clearly the different, rich smells of ripe watermelon, cantaloupe, squash, cushaw, cucumbers and a variety of greens, the sensing of them recalling to mind the peaceful farm I had but shortly before left and which, with these aromas, was so strongly calling me back. I shifted, suddenly rebellious once more at the crease fate had tumbled me into, twisting in my chair and eyeing, with a sudden loss of appetite, the cold dregs of coffee before me.

I couldn't endure it longer and, picking up my make-do suitcase, I paid the cashier and made my way down the gallery to walk for a little amid the fruits of the soil which I knew so well and which comforted me at the same time they roiled me with homesickness. Here I didn't mind the ceaseless activity about me—I ignored the people as though they weren't there—

concentrating on those sights and odors which were, in this alien place, all I really knew.

The big trucks were constantly muttering and roaring as they backed in or pulled up to unload at this or that space along the endless row of columns and busy hands seized upon the loads at once to put them into neat and attractive display. The people who worked in the stalls moved hurriedly, as though they had only this brief moment to complete their chores, but I

noted how quickly the stacks and piles grew under their skillful hands and how solidly they stood and how pretty the varieties of produce appeared, once the hands had worked their arrangement to the finish. The people, themselves, looked even more alien in my eyes, and I seem to remember they looked much darker than the other faces I scanned upon the streets. These faces, though, were like leather from exposure to the kind of life I knew but their hair was long and curly and black as a blackbird's wing and something fierce, which ran through the faces together, seemed frightening to me. But, looking back on these days, I was scared by anything strange—and nothing in this detestable place was familiar to me. Their manners were well made, though; none failed to greet me as I passed a stall, displaying startlingly white teeth in their dark faces as they smiled welcome to me, some with the produce in their hands, urging I select from them what I wanted to buy.

The lush, ripe produce looked most inviting, walled against the pink stucco partitions in the shade, and, as I continued on my way, the luscious fragrance brought to the hot morning a substance all its own. It

raided into the mind and made you hungry, when hungry you were not. I was too nervous, much too upset and too far out of my environment really to hunger—or pay attention to the feeling if I'd had it, and so I tried to keep my mind busy and calm by counting all the different objects for sale which did not come from a farm such as the one I used to call home. Tobacco, rolled into long rolls, like curls of

women's hair, hung from the beams; there was hard candy of all kinds and colors, some in glass jars, some in tins and those (which wouldn't melt) were open to the air (and the flies) in flat wooden boxes.

Some stalls were aglitter with glass jars of fruit, vegetables, and with counters thickly-laden with golden decanters of honey, the comb still in it; there were long troughs of apples, oranges, grapefruit, lemons, pears, apricots, plums and stacked pyramids of sugarcane. Some stalls offered lace and embroidery (which I fingered as pictures of Mama rose to dim my eyes with quickly concealed tears), hand-made handkerchiefs, cushions, post cards, souvenirs; while others were crowded with stack upon stack of wire cages which imprisoned chickens, ducks, turkeys, parrots and canaries.

I paused for a longer time here, touching the roosters through the wire and listening to their scolding and chuckling at me, the way the fowl used to do at home when I came into the yard to scatter feed to them. By now I was a long way down Decatur Street and, looking back, I saw again the vast stretch of white columns, lined in a row along the sidewalk with the stalls; felt the bustle and vigor of the activity and

eyed the many horses and wagons and trucks, parked as close as they could get. My glance then caught the entrance to Blaize's carpet store and I shrank back, surprised, not realizing that I'd come so far along Decatur in my wandering. Concealing myself, quickly, I saw Blaize come out to the front of his dingy establishment to hand small carpets for display and the sight of his filthy, fat monstrosity again made

revulsion rise in my gorge and I slipped down St. Philip street to turn hurriedly into Chartres, where a horde of warehouses were opened to the street with wide-flung doors revealing the gaping, cavernous dark inside. I turned into Royal Street.

This, I discovered, was entirely different from the streets which lay south of it and the sudden change in the atmosphere was surprising and refreshing. Here the shops were smaller, there were more of them and they were clean and neat, their front windows immaculate and shining in the morning light, iron work newly-painted and the tropical plants well-tended and radiantly alive with emerald leaf and colorful flower. It seemed to me that, here, flowers frothed from the very cracks in the mortar; they hung from suspended urns, looped over balconies and climbed up ancient walls, flowering and vining as they went. Here it was cool, shady and fragrant, like Mama's perfume, and the exposed brick in the sidewalks and corner alleys were like flagstones leading into some mysterious and tranquil garden.

I really slowed my pace, examining the displays in the windows, statues in metal and stone, pottery, delicate old jewelry, silk, Japanese fans and miniature

statuary of ivory. One was a perfume shop, its windows filled with decanters and flacons and the aroma so sharp it was nearly rancid. It made me think, again, of Mama and her eternal Verbena sachet. I caught the eye of a dark-haired woman who smiled from inside the shop, sending me on my way in confusion. Here

the people looked different—better dressed and cleaner in appearance—and they had a holiday air about them; not the haggard aura of the starving unemployed. Here and there I heard fragments of laughter; of feminine voices intense in coquetry and males responding to tease and beguile.

My spirits responded, lifting faintly to this new air and I became more aware of my own appearance, where—before—I had been too tangled in my troubles to notice. Now, in a display window which the shadows made into an excellent mirror, I took stock of myself. Hastily combed, my tumbled, dark hair contributed a rakish air, (in its shining mass,) which I attempted to imitate in my manner. My tight levis and shiny boots and cotton shirt (red as fire and stitched by Mama's clever fingers), I thought, well stated my masculinity. I looked like a pint-sized buccaneer and began to see that my mien was not at all out of place among the denizens in my place of exile.

As I realized this, my senses fell into tune with my environment and my feeling of being alien dropped away. Since I had carried its burden from the time I'd dropped from the truck at the French Market, it was a relief to feel it gone.

Instantly, I resolved to spend some time idling, exploring, learning and absorbing before I stampeded

off to try, in my unmistakable greenness, to find a job. As I turned away from the window into which I had been looking, absorbed in myself rather than in its display, I caught a glimpse of a man watching me, his reflection caught in the glass of the shop I'd been facing. He was standing across Royal Street, swing

me intently, and he continued to do so, I noted in another reflection as I moved on.

I dropped my eyes, embarrassed a little at someone staring—and staring he was—then stopped again pretending interest in another window to see if he was still looking. He was.

There may be many reasons for a man to look at a boy as young as I, but I could think of only one, now that I had experienced the quick explanations Cecil had given me. I'd talked to only two people since arriving in New Orleans and both of them had brought the subject into discussion. This puzzled me a little, yet, somehow, I realized it shouldn't for, if Dany and I had enjoyed it—had discovered it for ourselves—then why not others as well? The thought seemed logical to me, although others would never interest me. But, nevertheless, I made visual note of the man's intent interest in me.

Leaving the window to make my way on down the street, I paused momentarily to eye the displays in more windows and to gauge my bearings. Before I realized it, the man had crossed the street to my side as I stood admiring a huge onyx ring in one of the windows.

"Did you like the Persian kittens?" he asked, as I turned to him, questioningly.

"The—the what?" I asked, surprised and confused by his accosting me.

"The kittens—in the window about a block up," he said, smiling. "I saw you admiring them from across the street."

the street.

"Oh," I gulped, realizing for the first time that there were cats in the window where I'd caught his reflection. I added: "Why, yes."

"New in town, I'll bet," he said, extending the conversation into broader fields. I saw his eyes go to my black medicine bag.

"Got here yesterday," I replied, although reluctantly. I had never liked talking with complete strangers, especially about my own personal affairs. I was "stand-offish", Mama used to say. "Are you a detective?" I asked.

He laughed, softly.

"No, hardly. Why—do I remind you of a detective?"

"Well, not actually . . ."

The only detectives I had ever seen had been in the few movies I had seen and, this man standing beside me, was the best-dressed man I had ever seen—not that I had seen many. There weren't many up in Rankin County and the preacher, who always wore black, seemed the most refined dresser anywhere around. This man did not look refined, but the shine in his manner and in his dress caught my eye and, with his crown of brown, curly hair and his neatly trimmed mustache and sparkling eyes, he very much resembled Douglas Fairbanks, Jr. in my estimate. In fact, this was the best way I could describe him since the picture star was my only comparison. I noticed his

teeth, too, which were even and white. Like Fairbanks, he smiled with every word.

"I am new here, myself," he confided, which seemed

to set me, at once more at ease, considering him momentarily, like me, another lonely and, perhaps, confused newcomer. "Of course," he continued, "New Orleans is not really new to me. I make trips here quite often. You see, I own a sugar cane plantation just south of Plaquemine, and I come here to check on fall prices."

He was rich then! I concluded in my countryfied mind.

"What business are you in?" he asked.

I thought—what a question for him to ask me—conscious of worn, but neat, clothes and my sharp consciousness of being callow and inexperienced among the things and people of the city. Perhaps, though, he was only being polite.

"I have no business," I admitted, looking abashed. "Actually, I am looking for work," I blurted, feeling suddenly trustful of this handsome, well-dressed man. Perhaps it was because I confessed to something which was worrying me very badly, that he seemed to be someone I could confide in. Too, I felt that this gentleman, with all his wealth, might help me catch on somewhere. Like a drowning man, I was clutching for a helping hand . . . or a straw. Instinctively, rather than shrewdly, I was letting no idea, no angle go unexplored.

A slight frown touched his face.

"That's going to be rather difficult here, unless you are educated and have special talents. Employment is

very scarce now, you know."

I nodded.

"I'll do anything," I said. "I did farm work so I'm stronger than I look, but—in a cafe, washing dishes—anything will do for a start."

"You wouldn't want anything like that," he stated, decisively and I felt he was taking a geniune interest in my problem. "Are you really so desperate . . . ?"

"I've only got ninety dollars," I blurted, before I thought.

He smiled, then nudged me with a shoulder, man to man.

"That won't last long in this lively city," he chuckled. "But, maybe I can help. My name's Duel Delery, and I'll ask around in some of the businesses I'll be calling on. What's your name?"

I told him, gladly, hopeful for this man's help and the hope buoyed my spirits and I felt the dull depression within me lighten enough to permit me to smile and feel it.

"Do you have a place to stay?" he asked and I shook my head.

"No. I haven't even looked for a place. I've just been looking at the city," I confessed.

"I have a suite at the Monteleone, just down this street a couple of blocks. You may share it with me, if you like. I'll be here several days."

Suddenly Blaize's unpleasant voice came back into my memory, with its degrading assurance: "You'll get picked up—just you wait and see . . ." I hesitated a moment, undecided.

Was this pleasant, elegant man trying to pick me

up? It hardly seemed possible and, really, I didn't

think so. I knew I had to, at the end of all my worry and concern, trust someone. If I could pick someone influential and rich—certainly he didn't look as though my paltry ninety dollars was of interest to him—then I would choose him. The safety of my money, tucked away in my medicine kit, ceased to trouble me for the very obvious quality of the man. Yet, I played for time, some quality instinctive within me, like an animal, pointing toward caution and self-protection. The close look and look again and again before venturing into hazardous ground.

"I—but I would be—I would intrude," I protested, my voice giving no hint of my intent.

"No intrusion whatsoever," he replied, his pale blue eyes holding mine, his voice hearty with welcome. His eyes, I shall never forget, so strange (to me) their color and so intense the light in them as they seemed to hold mine, and mine unable to break the gaze. "After all, I may have as many guests as I want."

"But, I shouldn't," I protested, backing down. "It would cost so much there, and I need to find some place that's not so rich until I can locate a job of work."

He lifted his hand, the gesture one of controlled impatience.

"Nonsense. It won't cost me a cent more if one or five stay there," he pointed out. "Besides, you'll be saving your money while you stay with me—and you can keep it if you have to look for work. But, I'll be scouting around to find something for you to do."

I realized that all this was too good to refuse and,

under his artful and hospitable urging, I pushed Blaize's mournful warning to a concealed corner of my thoughts. I made my decision.

"Yes," I said, and suddenly—once having made up my mind—it was easy to talk to him on the subject. "I'll be grateful for a place to stay."

His smile was genuinely hearty, the eyes under their generously long lashes, sparkling like minnows in crystal, sun-lit waters and, taking my bag, companionably, he slipped his other hand lightly beneath my arm and steered me, keeping up a running fire of conversation, the few blocks to his hotel.

The entrance was gained up a flight of wide, marble steps and, at their top, by a series of swinging, glass doors. As we hurried briskly up the steps, Cecil Jarreau came quickly through one of them on his way to the street.

As he saw me, his drowsy eyes darted silver and he made me a merry wink—a know-it-all wink—his perceptive glance going quickly over my new acquaintance.

"Howdy, cowpoke," Cecil murmured, gliding smoothly down the steps. Duel Delery looked down at me, a question on his brows.

"Do you know him?" Duel asked, as we went through the shining glass into the richly-furnished lobby.

I explained to him that I had met the boy that morning and we had talked briefly over our breakfast at the Cafe DeMonde. I did not, however, reveal the nature of the talk which Cecil and I shared.

"He's not the kind for you to know," Duel said,

decisively, as if taking the reins of my future into strong, sure fingers. It bothered me a little.

The hotel lobby was the most beautiful building interior I had ever seen, a palace, actually, to me. I compared it in memory to the rotunda of the Mississippi state capital which I had seen once, its interior softly aglow with glittering chandeliers, which hung from the remote vault by great chains. Here, however, the sounds were muffled by deep, wine-colored carpet; enormous marble urns contained Japanese plants and there was, to my inexperienced eyes and ears, the atmosphere of a great cathedral, about which I'd studied in my school.

The richness, the plush presence of this elegant man beside me, escorting me as if I were dramatically important to his plans or in the world at large, made me feel weirdly nondescript. My worn levis and homemade shirt, contributed to my feeling out of place and I mentioned it to him, apologetically. He shrugged, saying:

"Brut, my boy, you look better than anyone I've seen in all my trips to this filthy town."

Although I loved flattery, mainly it made me cautious and his remark seemed strange to me. However, I continued with him under the magic spell he'd conjured up about me, with the rich promise, the intoxicating and mysterious promise (of his interest in me) of something unknown which lay at the end of all this. I was pulled along by something stronger than I, something veiled in beauty, with scents and sights which, to my inexperienced senses, were spectacular and irresistible. All the weight of all this material

grandeur played on my callow immaturity, my utter lack of knowledge of the world. I could no more have left him to return to the street than I'd have leaped through one of the shining glass door-panes.

The walls of the hallway down which he escorted me so proudly, loomed like the arch of a church, as if they, in their reminder of things holy, were trying to tell me something which would be of value in the life which lay ahead. I followed, trailing almost real tatters of grandeur, like a goddess inflamed by wine trailing webs of confetti, led by this strange man into a still stanger world.

I attempted to collect my senses; at least to arrange my thoughts into some pattern of order; to adjust my principles to some serene assembly which would give me the courage to turn and leave this provocative man and this overpowering atmosphere, but I could not. Mentally, I seemed drugged—captivated by something I could not understand—something, really, I did not want to understand but only to experience. On the heels of my many stinging and lasting hurts, these moments were as balm to my painful wounds and bruises.

I tried to think of Dany Buck; pictures of my mother and the farm I brought into mind but they were all too vague, beyond my power to make sharp. Dany's face, especially, was blurred, distant, aloof. I had the strange foreboding that I had suddenly lost my past—Dany with it—and there was nothing but this hour in time to bring fulfillment from the overwhelming futility of my existence. I was nothing . . . less than nothing . . . and no one cared but this

handsome, worldly man who was now putting th huge key into the lock on a door, now holding it bac considerately for me to go in.

I did so and reluctantly set my small black bag on a stool which stood at the end of the bed. With a sense of surprised clarity, I gazed about, as if suddenly awakened from a dream. The room was all of scarlet and gold—even the bedspread was shockingly red—and here and there, like bright pebbles in a stream, stood emerald vases and bowls, and upon the floor were scattered small rugs of a like color. Small, silk-shaded lamps glowed on each side of the bed and they, too were red; their crimson illumination spread its taint over the walls, the bed, the white and gold tables beside the bed, like some awesome kind of wickedness I could not name.

At the sight of this room, I knew it at once for a crimson den of sin. I wanted desperately to flee, and my mind broke from the bonds of its beguiled illusion as sanity came to me. The urge, however, was only momentary.

"Would you like to shower and freshen up a bit?" Duel asked, in invitation pointing to the white-tiled bathroom through the door beside the bed. "Then, we'll have dinner and see a show."

My principles fled, again, like mist before the sunny breeze. I thought once more of Blaize's fat body pressed against mine, obscenely, in the night; of his feet with their dirty claws like an animal's, of his sweat and the stench of the rancid walls, tattered and heavy with mold and urine and I weighed the cleanliness of my body against even the fruitless, cringing

contact I'd had with his world, and I knew I greatly needed a bath—if for no other reason than to wash every last, lingering thing that was Blaize out of my life and my recollection forever.

I nodded and peeling off my clothes, went in and took a hot shower, spending minutes with lathering every part of myself, even my soul, so I thought. And, when I had dried myself with a huge, red towel and returned to the bedroom, he was standing on the other side of the bed, naked also, and puffing lazily on a cigarette.

My eyes travelled over his naked body in a rapid moment and, as quickly, I compared him with Dany. Actually, in my life, the number of naked bodies I had viewed were very few and they provoked, always, something of excitement within me—an agitation I could not readily give a name.

He was as large as Dany, and almost as dark, but his flesh was smoothly without hair, save for the place about his crotch, and this was a thicket of chestnut brown. His body was not so hard as Dany's but there was to it a slim litheness, the muscles pronounced, with no excess flesh upon his frame. When he moved, there was an animal grace to the act, like a tomcat taking its way across short grass—each separate act of it giving off assurance—all the parts in balance and, flowing from it, something of power, of great and controlled strength, was displayed in every line of him. I could tell, with this glance, that he had, at one time, used his muscles in work—hard, gruelling work because the hardness still was plain upon his frame

and had not gone slack nor soft with his years.

judged these to be thirty-five at the most, but I was no hand at assessing age except in the livestock. There was upon his skin a cast of pink which suggested softness and of beautiful tone. Yet, I wondered if this appearance of inner radiance might not be the outer reflection from the crimson glow of the lamps.

At my entrance into the room, he turned and looked at me; looked me over, really (I saw his eyes race up and down my body) but this did not alarm me. I knew that other men—as I was—were avidly curious of the naked male form as of the female. Men, especially those of the farm, are curious about the sex of any animal, and that curiousity lights a certain, carnal antagonism within them.

He smiled and lay across the bed, cigarette poised in air.

"Let's rest awhile before we dress and push into that crowd downstairs," he suggested, drawing upon his cigarette; then when he'd expelled the smoke, he commented. "I've fought that mob all morning and my feet are killing me."

I answered by sprawling across the bed beside him, remembering that I had not slept the night before; the few moments I drowsed were ruined by the pawing and the cuddling of that miserable, filthy Blaize; and the feathery softness of the bed, the immaculate white sheets (like my bed which Mama had kept spotless) stole in upon my weariness, and my eye-lids grew heavy even as I strove to stay awake and upon my guard next to this stranger beside me.

There was a heavenly stillness in the room, a quiet about the handsome, naked form next to me and I lay

contentedly and listened to the burring sounds of the engines and the hoarse cackling of the horns on the cars in the street below. These were the sounds of a big city at mid-day and, thought unlike the sounds of home–the far-off voice of Mama singing to herself, the cackling of hens to signal the eggs were laid, the mooing of cows far down the pasture, the rustle of the breeze sorting out the leaves in the chinaberry trees–it was as restful, as soothing to my weary senses as the other. I pretended I was still on the farm, at my Papa's stone house, taking an early-evening nap as we used to do in seasons when the farm work was slack.

Finishing his cigarette and crushing it out in an emerald ashbowl on the bedside table, Duel turned and began, gently, rubbing the swelled plates of muscles across my chest.

"You have a fine body, Brut," he complimented me, "do you go in for the sports at your school?"

"Farm work made my body this way," I said, dreamily, relishing the feel of his warm hands on me, the balm which spread as he stroked, as though testing, measuring me. Somehow, I felt no guilt in his touch–somehow there was a gratefulness in it, making us closer together in his liberties–felt no betrayal toward Dany. I needed to be close to someone . . . needed it as a lost wanderer needs direction and food and shelter . . . needed the companionship of some other which was real and reassuring. His huge, warm hands

–radiantly smooth and with

smoothed me and soothed me as they moved and I stuffed up my pillow to lift my head so that I could lie and watch as he rubbed over my nipples, making

them stand up, hard, under his touch. His hands kept moving, down along the ripples of my ribs and my navel. As though he'd lost courage, his hand rose again to my chest and then traversed my left arm from wrist to shoulder blade and then went down again gaining more courage. He skipped my loins and, pulling my legs apart, he smoothed his warm hand up the insides of my thighs, along my calves to the ankles, netted with black hair, to move again to my thigh muscles and belly.

"You're a pearl button, Brut," he said, shaking me a little by a gently-taken handful of my inner thigh, "and as healthy as Zeus."

"It was hard work I did," I returned, my voice a hoarse whisper.

His hand lingered at my knee, fingers closing around the cap, the slow strength of his hand and arm spreading my leg away from my loins.

"Do you like me?" he asked then, turning so I saw the full light in his eyes. They were enormous pools of pale blue and I could see into the backs of them, like looking at violets which, mysteriously, have grown up and bloomed beneath the surface of the pond at home. I was too inexperienced to read what lay in their depths, but I could sense the turbulence, even in the fixed stillness of them. Their strange light fascinated me and his words, too, for by now I hungered in my

exile—in the brutal sentence Papa had passed upon me—for someone to like me and someone I could like and could trust in return.

"Yes, Mr. Delery," I answered, "I like you."

"Call me Duel," he insisted.

"Duel, then," I repeated, feeling wholesome and proud.

He withdrew his hand. "Do you mind my rubbing your muscles?"

I hesitated, even though I knew my answer. "No—no, I don't mind—what you do . . ."

"You're a fine, clean lad, Brut," he said, slowly, his drowsy voice stirring me, conjuring me with his well-laid flattery. "You're not like these other filthy little beggars who flit up and down the city streets. You're so fresh and clean and unspoiled."

"If you think so," I murmured, rubbing my eyes to keep from looking at him in my shyness. Then, lifting my head I put my hands beneath it, exposing my arm-pits, the dark fleece of my cruling hair. Seeing it, he rubs there, the soft crackle sounding in the still room. I had always responded, excitedly, to caresses under my arms, where hair lay so thickly, and Dany, finding this vital mark on my body long ago had laid his lips hotly against it in order to make the blood of my desire beat more violently within me. Now Duel's hand, going softly up and down, was having the same effect upon me, and I squirmed my thighs, spreading them longingly as my senses flamed up in me at the urging of sensations I was helpless to curb or control.

He seemed to be aware of my inner agitation, for he suddenly leaned forward to kiss the mat of hair beneath my arms and, with his tongue out, slid down my chest to feed fretfully at a nipple and then going on hungrily over my rib-box to my navel. There he thrust his tongue into the hollow, a very sensitive place and,

as he did so, my back arched without my conscious direction, lifting my buttocks from the bed and giving him a heated invitation from a passion gone out of control. Placing both hands along my hips, his long fingers extending around to my buttocks, he swiftly slid downward and the next instant his hot mouth seized me. I twisted and squirmed and, lowering my hand, gently freed myself.

He looked up to me, his eyes blazing with puzzled inquiry.

"What's wrong?" he asked in a soft, excited whisper. "Don't you like it?"

"I—I'm afraid you will—bite me," I answered, at the same time so engorged with passion and fright I could hardly draw my breath. This I had never known —never experienced, and was totally ignorant of, even in secretive talk with other boys. Dany and I had never involved this act of doing things in our love-making. Dany had topped me and used me as he would in covering a woman. This was utterly new, utterly strange and unimagined, utterly and wildly thrilling in the least of the concept and, since this was no offense against the memory held of Dany's way with me, somehow, it brought on no sense of guilt. I felt, in no way, any sense of betrayal of our trust.

"I wouldn't bite you for the world," Duel said, softly, his lips in the thick triangle of black curls at the bottom of my belly, going on to my navel and the insides of my thighs. I tensed with anticipated delight as I felt him approach again but, now, the tight sac of my masculinity slipped into the hot, gently pulling mouth and unimaginable and delightful waves of feel-

ing made every nerve and muscle leap and quiver at the unbearable sensation.

"I just want to make you happy, baby," he whispered, after he freed me, and in passage from below to above my belly to capture again my rigid, pulsing body. The hot, drawing, liquid caress goes up and down from the itching tip to the throbbing base as I flatten in delight against the bed. His hands lift and prison my buttocks as, fighting to press myself downward to grant his every hunger, I lie and let him take his fill of me. This strong man, this handsome stranger tugged at my loins like a calf at its mother's udder and, at intervals, also like the calf when the milk does not come down, his haunches pushed and plunged. Like the calf, he strips my trembling rigidity with his tongue, active as a snake, so much so it feels as though it were coiled completely about me. The small roughness of its texture gives the underside of me a thrilling and torturing sweet irritation and then the daring tip of it is probing the tip of me, priming it now for the molten explosion I can feel gather, deep inside my belly. And then it comes and I cry out and my bones crack with the force of it as my body ecstatically arches and curls around his shoulders in the hard vise

of my release.

Groaning and panting, I finally fell back, completely spent and thrilled beyond the edges of my sanity by his touch, dry and empty as his wanton lips wring out the last vestiges of my strength, the questing tongue never ceasing in its pursuit.

Weakly I lift my head, unbelieving, to see him still buried at the hollow of my lifted thighs. Through my

sex—my seed—which had channeled through
body into his, I was now a part of him and he, by
act, was now a part of me. I lay back and let hi
continue his pleasure in my body, exploring wi
hands and lips, tugging, tasting my flesh, along
inner thighs, over my belly, blinded by his own d
sires.

He does not cease for a moment and soon I feel
return of the delight and excitement in his love.
nervelessly stretch out an arm to lightly brush his ha
with my finger-tips but he gives no sign if he know
his lips and hands are busy in their expressions
love. It is not long before his desire has brought hi
back from the planes and the curves of my body
that most vital and sensitive concentration and h
once more attacks there in his siege of amorous feve
Soon, I, too, give the unmistakable indication that hi
caresses have driven home to arouse and agitate m
and, once again, he captures staff and flag and wit
them storms my fort to the very powder magazine, th
explosion racking every element of my structure as hi
rapacious fervor ignites the shock. I cannot stand th
unbearable delight and again my body curls withou

volution as the knives of delight cut and pierce from top to bottom, side to side and through and through. He will not let me go and I begin to feel faint, drained and feeble; lights bursting behind my eyes, my mouth is open to cry out but no sound will come. Just before I lose consciousness, he frees me and, once more, the ceaseless pattern of his caresses begins.

I cannot resist; my body is limp as a dishrag and I

am drenched with sweat. I am his now, my body, my sex (though not my love—that is still Dany's) and I marvel at the artistry of his mouth, marvel at how he can seek out the whole of your being and, in the process, send you to dizzying, soaring heights that threaten you with madness and leave you fainting. Duel's love-making has made me feel as I had never felt before and never expect to feel again.

As he goes on, ceaselessly caressing, kissing me, I fall back, boneless, and my thoughts return again to the farm. The colts with their mother and how their tails wag as they hide their shiny heads under the shadowy flanks to draw out the nectar. I recall the stallions and how, drawn by the odor, one will approach another and nibble at his hardened member, progressing from nibbling to laving it with his tongue at the tip and actually taking it into his mouth.

I had never compared these known and little-considered things to sexual acts with a male, although I had seen the stallions do it a number of times. I wondered at the strange parallels which were coming into my knowledge from the once-dark mysteries of my desire and wondered more at the mystery of their

revelation. With Dany and now with Duel, the things I had felt inside me as stings of want for something I could not explain, now were clear to me. I marvelled at the connections Duel had put together in my consciousness as he continued his fervid ministrations to my body, continued in the manner of one who would never get enough.

At last he had his fill of me and lay with his head in the hollow of my thighs, arms coiled about me, his lips

speaking strange things, still, to my flesh as he whispered, lovingly.

"You are the finest boy I have ever known, or will ever know, should I have ten thousand in the future."

"Why?" I asked, drowsily as his lips pulled teasingly at the silky hair on my thighs.

"Because I know you are pure," he replied slowly. "You are young and pure and clean and innocent and you have never given your stem to anyone but me."

I thought of Dany Buck. Now that the time for sex had passed, now that I was drained of all desire and need—had been awakened to reality and was not still drugged on the strangeness of desire—I knew I had been unfaithful to him. I had lain in sex with another man. And I had promised Dany—had promised myself—that no one should ever possess my body except him and that I should be his so long as ever he wanted me. Now another had fondled and excited me; had siphoned my substance until I was near fainting; had taken his pleasures from my body, but, somehow differently. I grew puzzled. Uncoiling my legs from the toils of his warm arms, I sat on the edge of the soft

bed and tried to think.

A silence grew around us. I could not look at him. My mind, my thoughts, my very knowledge of being was engulfed in Dany. The spirit of myself whisked away, out of this devilishly beautiful room and back to the farm. Once again I could hear Dany's hushed, passionate voice whispering to me:

"Bru, if only I can love you for the rest of my life, I will never want for nothing else."

Now, with a horrible feeling of emptiness, I felt like

I had been robbed.

"What's the matter?" Duel asked me, laying a hand on my thigh. "You're staring as though you'd seen a ghost."

"Nothing," I murmured, my voice muffled by reason of dropping my face into my hands. Suddenly I wanted tremendously to weep, but no tears would come; I was dry of tears as I felt drained and empty of substance.

"How do you feel?" he asked, after a moment's silence and he lit a cigarette which he took from a ruby-set golden case, waiting silently for my reply.

I looked up—then buried my face again in my hands.

"I feel cheap—ashamed!" I blurted.

"You regret what we have done, then?" he asked.

"Not—not really, but I—I . . ."

"What then?"

I paused, reluctant to answer, but the feeling of emotion, of my betrayal of Dany laid a painful hold on my senses and I wanted to tell someone

"It's–it's just that I–I knew someone once, someone I promised . . ." A heavy silence fell.

"Oh, I see," he said, tapping his cigarette against the ash bowl. "You know someone whom you've done this with and you feel ashamed because you think you have been unfaithful to him–is that it?"

I nodded, relieved that he had put it into words for me.

"Does this person know you are here in New Orleans?"

"Yes," I whispered, remembering swiftly the last

mortifying moments at home, and with Dany. "He–he loves me."

"And do you love him?"

"Yes, I love him; always have. There's been no one ever except Dany," and, I added almost in a whisper: ". . . and you."

"Has this Dany ever done this with any . . ." I shook my head.

"No," I replied quickly, cutting off his speech. "He has never touched anyone except me . . . never."

He rises and goes to the window. Lifting the drapes, he stares into the distance, over the city. His back is to me and the red glow of the lamp throws a fantastic light on his naked body. He is completely illuminated, as though he glows from within.

"Who is this Dany?" he asked.

"My father's–cowman-shepherd."

Slowly he turned and gazed at me.

"And you and Dany lived on the farm and made

love together?" he pressed on.

"Yes," I returned.

Duel made a clicking sound with his tongue.

"It sounds too good to be true—perfect, in fact—you and him always together."

"It was perfect," I agreed, the memory welling up within me of Dany and I by the pond, in the woods, hidden in the quiet shadows. "It was the only real happiness I've ever known."

He came back to the bed and sat beside me. He acted as though he felt sorry for me, and put his hand gently on my shoulder.

"Could I ask you a personal question, Brut?" He

shrugged at the words. "God knows, I've asked enough personal questions already, but it's just that I'm interested in you—what happens to you—your happiness—understand?"

I nodded. It was good to know that someone cared —even a little—what happened to me.

"Ask me anything you want," I muttered, my dark veil of shame lifting a little.

"Why did you come to New Orleans? Why did you leave this Dany?"

I gulped and I felt my face turn crimson as the bedspread.

"My Papa caught us," I finally answered, staring at the red wall, "so he ran me off from home."

"Why didn't he make Dany leave?" Duel asked, surprised.

I explained to him, in as few words as I could, then gave the rest of my story—the ride on the vegetable

truck and the night with my Papa's miserable cousin, Blaize.

"So, it was right out of the frying pan into the fire," he remarked, sympathetically. "And right into my arms," he added with a twist of a smile.

"I suppose," I replied, thinking of nothing better to say, but I did like this man; his clean, smooth body—the way he had with me. He made me feel at home and that I was somebody—somebody important to him.

"Will you ever go back to your Dany?" he asked, probing still farther, though not in a way to meddle or be cruel—just in his interest in my feelings and my future.

"It's too late to go back," I answered, lamenting the truth of the words as my eyes suddenly filled with tears. "It's all spoiled for Dany and me, now and Mama—Mama left Papa for good and all."

I felt the futility of it—my own deep despair and I wondered, oddly why I was bothering to tell all this—why I was pouring out my unhappiness to another. I asked him to forgive me.

"I'm glad you told me," he said, his kind face showing this clearly. "For I want you, Bru," (God! he was calling me 'Bru' as Dany had!) he went on. "I want you because you're a fine boy and you've got what I want and what I need."

I thought of us in bed together, his head between my thighs, and I sensed that he was sincere; that this was not merely fulfilling his lust of the moment.

"I'm glad someone does," I said, feeling his warmth,

his need and thankful that I could fulfill it. For some reason, now in this room with him beside me, warmly close, speaking longingly to me, I did not feel Dany's need for me, nor mine for him. All that, now, seemed a long way off—a dream now, really—a dream from which I had awakened and could not bring from my sleep to my waking world.

"Could you ever love me, Bru?" he asked, lifting my chin and looking deeply into my eyes. I stared up at him and saw the blue depths naked with pleading, burning with physical desire I could readily understand, for I had always been in tune with the physical rather than the mental side of people. After a moment's thought, I answered in a low voice:

"Not like Dany, Duel . . . not ever like that. For I

will always care for him, but," I stared, dumbly, at the carpet, "but if you want me—you can have me."

He bent and kissed me warmly on the mouth; rising he went to the window again and stared absently, as if he saw something outside other than the city and the sky.

"God!, if I lost you now, I'd go mad!" he said, almost bitterly, a sharp note in his voice. Rushing to me, he swept me into his arms, bending my body back until I thought my back would break and smothering me with kisses. He began to whimper lightly, then broke into a deep sobbing.

"Don't cry, Duel," I pleaded, feeling the wild surge of the need he held for me and glorying in the glad knowledge that I was needed. Dany was gone, now, and there was a sad ache in my heart for him as I gave

myself to another. "I won't leave you, Duel, ever—I promise!"

Oh, God, what I had promised! What had I so carelessly tossed away, all because of another's lips on mine, another man's arms around my body? The undying, deathless love Dany and I had shared! I was throwing all this away just because a few miles separated us from one another. Like precious cargo on a sinking ship, I was tossing Dany overboard, just because the ship was going down and I was doing everything possible to save it—but not the cargo. Dany was my precious cargo and without him, without his love, both physical and spiritual, why should it matter to me whether the ship floated or sank?

But this naked man holding me in his strong arms, his hot kisses telling me strange things—things

difficult to understand through his sobbing, his lips pulling up my heart by the roots and eagerly transplanting another one, fresh for him.

We lay back on the bed together, as he cuddled my small body close, my old world swept away like a house goes down before a hurricane. We talked long; he told me of his life, of his coming from Georgia when his parents died and the inheritance. With it he bought an old, abandoned plantation in Plaquemine and built it into a sugar cane empire. I told him, too, bits and pieces of mine, and thought how strangely we were met, our lives, our ways so far distant apart, yet now so close. Then I asked him a question which had bothered me since we had entered the hotel and passed Cecil.

"The reason I said you should not know his kind is because, Bru, baby, that loathsome kid is a prostitute." His answer was abrupt as he fondled my thighs.

"But I thought only women were prostitutes!" I cried, amazed and also aware of my great ignorance in such matters.

He sat up in bed, propping his body with both pillows, and lit another cigarette, filling the air with smoke.

"Your ignorance apalls me," he said, after a moment, waving the smoke aside, "but I would give Hallow Grove had I still that same ignorance about this ignominious life. In big cities like this one, baby, and especially in the foreign countries, older countries far ahead of us in civilization, there are as many male prostitutes roaming the streets and bars and night clubs—and bordellos—as there are women. More, per-

haps and because society does not acknowledge them, they're not numbered or catalogued. For that reason, no one knows how many there are . . . but the number, you may believe it, is tremendous. There are bars and clubs who cater to their kind . . . or our kind—we are called fairies."

"What?" I cried, completely dumbfounded. I did not even know there was a name for men who loved men.

"Fairies," he repeated. "A fairy is a man, like us, who loves only other men. Some are masculine in their personalities, others are more feminine. Some of these will let a man mount him like a woman—sometimes, even, will wear women's clothing."

As he talked, I lay and listened, swept up on this complete new world, seeing mental pictures of this bizarre existence, this half-world of dim light and freakishness. Above all, I suddenly saw myself as a part of it, and asked, feverishly:

"You mean boys who let men—uh, screw them—wear girl's dresses?"

"Yes," he continued, as I turned crimson. I thought of Dany's mounting me, but I could not think of myself in woman's attire, nor could I understand why it would be essential. We were both men, in our bodies, and—in the case of Duel and I—what would be the purpose in changing that? We had enjoyed each other, being men, and there had been love in it, between men—but to change that in any way would have spoiled it. I blurted, anxiously:

"Don't, Duel. Stop it—please don't tell me anymore. I don't want to hear it."

"Why?" he asked, puzzled, burying my face in th
plane of his chest.

"Because," I murmured, kissing his neck, "if we a
to stay together, I don't want us to be like them . .
like fairies . . . never. I want us to be me—like Dan
and I were!"

"I wouldn't have it any other way," he assured me
folding me in his arms and kissing me affectionately . .

CHAPTER FIVE

I remained with Duel Delery for a week after we met, up until the last moment when he checked out of the Hotel Monteleone and left instructions that I was to remain in the hotel (he paid the suite up for another week) until he sent for me to come and live with him at Hollow Grove sugar cane plantation at Plaquemine.

at Hallow Grove sugar cane plantation at Paquemine.

With him, that week was a glorious time, the most exciting I ever knew, for he took me everywhere in New Orleans worth seeing: to Tabary's theatre, to Beauregard Square, to Pirates' Alley, the Cabildo, the State Museum, the Wax Charade, the Delgado Art Museum at the City Park, the Fair Ground races, the Metairie Country Club, to Pontchartrain Beach, the Zoo, the Jazz Museum, clubs, restaurants and antebellum homes, relics of the Civil War.

He bought me clothes: a fine, black pin-striped suit, fashionable in that year of 1936, a Stetson hat and cowboy boots (which I wanted desperately but which he loathed). I had shirts galore, an imported continental suit (from Italy) and pink French-cuffed, lace worked shirts to go with it (then all the rage). He bought me dozens of cuff-links, some extremely gaudy, but my taste and not his, as well as a good travelling case of Morocco leather.

I was dressed better than I had ever been in my life, and for once I seemed to find in him and his genuine

love for me a future for myself.

In the hotel room, waiting forlornly for him to pack, it took all my small courage and resolve not to try, desperately, to hold him back. Then, like that somehow, long-past moment with Dany on my tragic night of exile, he swept me into his arms, clung to me with hungry lips, his agitation like a thing uncaged.

"I could eat you alive, Bru!" he gasped, hugging me to him so tightly I hurt. "I could swallow you whole."

God! How I wished he had. How much easier would that have been! If he had just done it, then

would that have been if he had just done it, there and then, and gone on to his home in Plaquemine, carrying me—rather than leaving me as he did.

"Remember—a week at the most," he said, shaking his finger at me. "Then, I'll send for you." And the last: "I will always love you, Bru . . . always. Good bye."

Good bye! And that was all.

I remained in the hotel for the next week, wore my beautiful clothes and spent the most of my remaining money with confident hopes, my heart singing because I'd soon be on my way to his glorious plantation to live with him—forever.

"Well, hot-shot, you sure learned in a hurry," Cecil said, bitingly to me, meeting as I emerged from the hotel, elegant in my new black suit and a coral-pink shirt. "You sure found yourself a sugar-daddy!"

I let him gloat, took him for a good meal, which he said he needed, and then to a movie: "Captains Courageous" and I told him everything. When the show was over, I asked if he'd liked it and he said:

"Sure, hots . . . sure. But that English kid—he sure was a son-of-a-bitch!"

I bumped into Cecil often—every day, to be exact—and usually in the same vicinity . . . Jackson Square, the Cafe DeMonde, and along Pirates' Alley and Chartres street. He seemed to be neater than when I first met him, his curly hair shone and his face was radiant . . . the look of soap, water and daily shaving.

"Been having some luck, myself," he explained, when I commented on his appearance. "Some old boy from Algiers, in here on some boring business—didn't

bother to ask him—but he's loaded, hots and willing to hand it over if Ah cooperate. Ah don't care who swings on my rod—so we're both happy."

But my happineess was wearing thin—wearing out, in fact. The week passed, I left the Monteleone and lived in a bachelor hotel called the Banjo. It was just two blocks from the Monteleone and I wanted to be close by when Duel sent for me, so I checked into the nearest and cheapest I could find. It was a rat's nest—like that of Blaize in comparison to the splendid surroundings at the Monteleone—but, as Cecil said: "It's good enough, hots. You won't be there much, anyway."

The room itself was about the size of my Papa's potato crib on the farm back home . . . and about as dingy. Unpainted, the planks running vertical, rather than horizontal, one door leading out into a narrow hall covered with chicken wire and a window looking out on another (dark and a dead end, the view looked like the back door to Hell), the only furniture was a cot with a thin, striped mattress, a chair, a homemade night table and a can for an ashtray. The door could not be locked from either side and swung loosely like

a screen, rattling, constantly, a piece of dilapidated chain which had acted as a fastener before it was broken.

Every morning after slipping down the dark hall to take a cold shower, usually under the hungry, hooded eyes of aged derelicts who found their pleasure in ogling young transients, I'd dress and rush to the Monteleone desk to ask if there were any news from

Mr. Delery. Every day, I stepped away, disappointed, but some little hope kept me returning—either the feel of my new clothes, or an encouraging word from Cecil.

"He'll send you word, hots," he'd say, patting me on the back. "If he loves you—loves your stud—he'll send for you. Fairies can't live without their kicks!"

During this time, I didn't look for a job because my future, I thought, was mapped out for me: a life of leisure on a rich plantation as Duel's lover. I spent money freely, usually 'set up' Cecil with meals and a show each day, for his 'sperm money' (as he called it) was running low. Within two more weeks, I was almost broke, desperate and broken-hearted.

I still called daily at the hotel, still hoping to hear from him—any news, now, but it was always the same.

"No, Mr. Delery has sent no message, but he always makes reservations early in advance for fall buying. Would you like to leave a note for him?"

The third week, I was almost out of my head. If it had not been for Cecil, I know I'd have lost my mind.

"You can't go on like this, hots," he encouraged me, bending over to peer into my tear-filled eyes. "Get

yourself another sugar-daddy and live it up. This other guy will never know the difference. It's not like a woman. A guy can tell if a woman is stepping out on him but he can't know if a boy's been loaning his rod out."

I refused, however, to cheat on Duel as I had Dany. I couldn't bring myself to. There'd been something wonderfully clean and beautiful about both Dany and

Duel possessing me, but I couldn't picture giving myself to another; risking my heart a third time. Somehow, there was still in my secret hopes the feeling that Duel wanted me and would send for me; it must be that something vitally important was holding him back. I invented excuses . . . things going badly at the plantation with the fall harvest, hard to find hired help (Cecil laughed at that, with all the unemployment around), busy redecorating the house for me or just busy planning a coming-home party in my honor. All foolish, unrealistic, stupid.

I sold the Morocco suitcase, then my suits, then the big assortment of colored shirts and, last of all, my cuff-links, getting only a fraction of what they'd cost Duel.

"Don't sell your Stetson or boots," Cecil advised and so I kept them. "Fairies like boys diked out in cowpoke clothes."

So we tramped the Vieux Carre daily, always together, never venturing across the boundaries of the French Quarter and never parting unless he found a "customer" or, at night, when we parted to go to our rooms. Although he allowed men to pick him up, frequently, asking me to wait in the Square of the

Cafe until he came back, he always returned, sooner than I expected, grinning, his blue eyes darkly fatigued and with a few bills in his levis. Many times, he allowed himself to be picked up as many as five times in an afternoon—more frequently during the long nights. His physical appearance, I noted, after these

excursions always looked wan and depleted and his manner dimmed almost to the point of moroseness. His eyes looked caved-in, his cheekbones protruded through skin which had lost its life and gone sallow.

I grew to like Cecil immensely, for two main reasons: we were exiled into a world of anarchy, together —for whatever comfort we could be to each other in the fact—and he sold his body so he and I might continue to eat and have a place to sleep. He never complained and, when I brought the subject up (which I did at every meal) he always shut me off.

"Shuck it, hots. When you had loot, you spent plenty on me, now didn't you? And, you'll have more again, when you get word from that Delery fairy. Besides, you've got the looks for it and, when you start selling them, we'll be on heaven street."

When I started selling my looks!

In desperation, during those terrible times when he was with one of his customers, doing what I knew he had to do to keep the both of us alive, I haunted the employment agency, the docks along Dumaine and Toulouse and Bienville and Poydras, hoping to find work unloading the ships; I tramped the French Market, the fish market and cafes and lounges, searching for anything to do for Cecil and me . . . anything except selling my body.

I loved Cecil for sacrificing himself for me and I hated him for doing it, all at the same time. In one sense, I was too proud to stoop to such things but I was also sick within over my lost loves: Dany and Duel. I couldn't bring myself to let somebody rub filth into the crevices of my broken heart.

But, gradually, like the onset of some deadly disease, it started for me and (I told myself, facing the fact) it was a disease I could not escape. I think I had always known it would happen. It was late afternoon –near dusk and I was sitting in Jackson Square to wait for Cecil, who'd just followed a man beyond the retaining wall at the wharf in the hope of a score. We were both flat broke—not a penny between us—and neither of us had had a bite to eat, all day. For us, it was the very bottom of our existence and our endurance was frighteningly thin. I sat, brooding, a little ashamed for letting Cecil do all the "work" and my mind probed here and there, as tears came into my eyes and I wiped them away in wretchedness, turning over pictures of home.

I wondered what they would be doing this time of evening, yet I knew, having lived the pattern every day of my life on the farm. Dany would be milking the cows or, having finished, would be turning them into the barn lot for the night, going to play with the baby sheep and putting them in stalls on beds of golden straw. Mama would be in the kitchen, the room golden as hollyhocks in the glow of the oil lamps . . . no, I thought, with a catch of my heart . . . Mama would not be there. Mama had done. She had left Papa—left him because of me! Papa? I knew, whatever else

happened, he'd be comfortable in slippers with his long, crooked-stemmed pipe in his mouth, evening paper in his hands as he read. Down in the pastures, the horses would be idling away the time before the

dark, taking a last frolic in the pasture before coming up to the barn. The frogs would be chanting in the pond, the crickets would be chirping in a chorus and the calm of approaching night would be spreading over the farm, covering the fields, the buildings and the house like a quiet hand, soothing the pain from an aching heart.

Hot tears streaked my face and dropped off my chin as, my stomach growling with painful protest, I remembered the table Mama used to set: half hams, fried chicken, potatoes and thick gravy, baked yams dripping golden butter, bread as fluffy as down and rich, warm milk. I choked down a sob as I remembered it was gone—the farm, Mama, Dany!

Then I saw Cecil returning over the wharf, down the steps at the retaining wall, past the Jax Brewery and across Decatur Street. Wiping away my spineless tears and trying to compose my sorrowful face, I watched Cecil closely, knowing he'd be at my side soon. But, long before he reached me, I knew something was wrong. He hadn't scored. His gait was slow and uncertain and, as he came up to me, his eyes were the saddest I'd ever seen them. He knew I was, childlike, depending on him and, liking to have me (especially) depend on him, he felt keenly that he had failed and let me down. His loyalty fell warmly across my tired heart like a banner, and I knew I would love Cecil for his loyalty until my dying day.

He crouched, slowly, to sit on the bench beside me, felt in his shirt for his tobacco sack and then, realizing he had none, pretended to be buttoning the

pocket-flap. He sat quietly for a moment, his drained face catching the dying rays of the setting sun. Sweat was beaded over his forehead and his whole frame appeared to be on the point of crumbling collapse, decadent and debased by long and foul usage.

"Dirty, lousy tight-wad fairy," he grated through clenched jaws. "But I screwed him, anyway, Bru—screwed him good. Ah only pretended to come and the stupid bastard didn't know the difference."

At that instant, I realized with clarity that it was my turn, now. One look at Cecil's pale, sad face; the droop of his fatigued body trying vainly to conjure up the heat of desire which is cold, tore through me and kindled a smolder of silent, rebellious anger. I had loved Dany and, through my love, lost him; lost him just as now knew Duel was lost to me. Both of them I had lost because of sex and I damned it in my heart. Now, my love went out to Cecil, collapsed beside me, hopelessly, on the bench. But, I felt nothing of sex for Cecil and, armed only with love, I determined I would trample sex into the gutter if I could serve my love for him.

I had come to the end of my world. I would share Cecil's world with him, whatever, the life and the end might be. I loved him more in that moment than I had ever loved anyone, including Dany and Duel, for I realized that, his curly head bowed in defeat which possessed him like a nightmare, his was a love and loyalty a thousandfold greater than either Dany's or

Duel's. They had wanted me, and so, they had taken me, with no sacrifice. The sacrifices Cecil had made—

asking nothing but my loyalty—heaped themselves suddenly before me like a cache of stolen coins.

I rose, and looked at him, desperation choking me.

"Where are you going, hots?" he asked, his voice flat, toneless.

"I'll be back in a minute—just a little," I replied, looking at him through a sudden film of tears. "Just wait for me, right here."

He nodded, a twisted grin working over his lips.

"Think you can make out better, hots?" he asked, exhaustedly.

I gave a little whistle, winked and strolled off through the Square, determined that, before the night was over, Cecil and I would eat. I was a small, undaunted fury of determination and, passing the Jackson statue I mumbled to myself:

"You ain't got nothing on me!"

I remembered an old, bald-headed vulture of a man at the Banjo who always seemed to be in the shower when I was there; remembering the way his vague watery eyes rolled when I loosened the towel about my waist to step into the cold spray of the water. I hoped, desperately, that he would be there, or somewhere in the hotel.

I went up to my room, looked in both halls and in the shower but he was nowhere to be seen. I went into the toilet and pretended to relieve myself. A big, burly man in the latrine shook his head violently at my approach and gave me a hard look, then sullenly sauntered out. Another man, wry, wrinkled and old

with chin whiskers like a billy-goat and so pale and
he could hardly walk, came in. He stopped at the

thin he could hardly walk, came in. He stopped at the wash basin, splashed water on his face and dried with a red bandana from his hip pocket. I continued to stand at the urinal, pretending nonchalance, but with fatigue and hunger and despair besieging me from all sides. I was about to give up when the old man I sought suddenly appeared. His eyes almost sparkled as he saw me and he shuffled to the urinal, two places down, and began to fumble with his pants.

Knowing he was looking at me, I slowly dropped my pants to mid-thigh and stood there, playing with and fondling myself until I had gotten an erection. I could almost feel his trembling, even from the distance. Then I turned to him, eyeing him steadily, not batting an eye. It was my invitation.

Automatically, he picked up the cue and, dropped to his knees before me, seizing me with toothless gums. I allowed him his moment but, like Cecil, only pretended to sperm, hunching several times as if in delight. Then I backed off and pulled my levis up, buttoning the fly.

"I want five dollars," I said in a harsh voice, glaring at him.

"Law!" he said, suddenly beginning to shake. "You never mentioned no money!"

"I just did!" I continued, taking confidence from his confusion and throwing myself into the part. "Five dollars, I said!" My eyes on his were cold and menacing. I thought of Cecil, sitting on the cold bench in the dark, hungry, weary, despairing.

"Ah'll tell the desk-clerk!" he threatened, his knotty

hands fumbling with each other, nervously. He was still on his knees. "He don' like no such goin's-on here . . ."

"He doesn't, eh?" I snarled, sounding tough as I knew how. "The police don't like it, either. I'm under age, fellow, so make up your mind . . . quick!"

"Laws!" he gasps, squirming, terrible, old eyes dancing with fear. "Ah never thought Ah'd see the day I'd be caught contributin'," he mumbled, hand going into a grimy pocket to bring out a crumpled, tattered five-dollar bill. "Ah won't get no supper tonight," he pleaded, his face hopeless but I ignored it.

"You've had your supper, old man," I said, sarcastically and his toothless mouth pops open in affront.

I left swiftly. Once outside, hurrying down the hall and into the street, only then do I feel pangs of guilt and fear. What would have happened if someone had come into the toilet while the old man was on his knees?

That night, Cecil and I stuffed ourselves. We went to a little golden-lit cafe below the French Market on Decatur and after we'd eaten, I bought him a sack of tobacco and we sat under a canopy of homey light, drinking coffee as he smoked and we listened to music coming from a radio at the end of the room. I marvelled at the light in Cecil's eyes, the bland contentment on his face and the little signs of appreciation he displayed for what I had done. His pleasure was almost childish at receiving attention and a little consideration. I realized he'd never had much of either, most of the men who picked him up would show no sign of affection or that they liked anything but his

body and there is little if any self-gratification in that. I knew, remembering Duel and recognizing, now, his damned pretense and the foul, old coon-ass whose fall onto his knees had been only to feed some long-denied hunger in his ancient, evil heart. I could see, now, the long line of such people in connection with Cecil—all of them taking—none of them giving, but I ignored completely the effect of such indifference upon myself, who was to live out his future life in a similar file of such men.

I had enough left from my 'prostitute' money that night to treat us to a show and a sack of popcorn. We saw "Wuthering Heights" and he sniffled all the way through it, even sobbed during the death scene and I was so overwrought with emotion myself that I caught something of his acute unhappiness—a thing I'd never detected in him before this night—no more than I had credited his tenderheartedness—and asked him to stay with me at the Banjo Hotel.

"I'll be sprouting wings next," he said, wryly when I made the proposal, but, nevertheless, he went and that night, without sex, he slept in my arms in that dark cubby-hole of a room. While he slept, exhausted, I lay awake, his body pressed to mine, making many vows. And the next morning, I put the vows into words.

"You're not going to sell yourself again for money," I told him as I stood above him, looking down on his small, naked body on the soiled mattress. I had thought we were much of a size but I realized, seeing him completely naked, that he was smaller, more delicate than I. Not womanly delicate—just small. But there was a growth of thick, wiry hair on his chest and

crotch which added immensely to his ruggedness and made up for his delicate frame.

"I guess you'll want to marry me, too," he jibed, drowsily, folding his arms behind his head as I rolled him a cigarette and put it between his lips.

"Not marry you, Cecil," I explained, admiring him as he lay there in the soft shadows of morning. "Just look after you. You've suffered enough. You've had your hard times and it's time you quit and lived like a human being."

"You're taking a lot on your back," he murmured, "but it all sounds too good to be true."

"I want to look after you," I said, feeling it all the way through as I spoke. "It will give me something to work for, to live for—because, Cecil, I have no one—not any more. No one who cares."

"I care, Bru," he said, taking my hand and holding it to his heart. I bent and kissed him on the forehead.

So, for then—for that time—the always uncertain time with nothing stable to hold to, I kept my word to Cecil. I never allowed any man to pick him up, and he kept, faithful, to me. Keeping his vigil, waiting out my customers, he would lounge under the striped canopy of the Cafe DeMonde; or wait for me in the square, feeding the pigeons, talking to the nuns who always walked the square in pairs; or in attending a movie which he would tell me about, in great detail, afterward. Cecil loved the movies, especially the westerns, and Buck Jones, Ken Maynard, Rex Belle and Gene Autry were his gods.

I was relieved by this, for I always worried about him when I was about the business of being off with

some score, and I felt better inside if I knew he was at one of his favorite movie theatres. I always stuck back an extra dollar for this purpose . . . my "relief" money . . . for, actually, I was jealous of Cecil, although we never had sex with each other and I think I would have tried to kill any man who dared lay a hand on him in lust. If Cecil was in a movie, I always felt he was pretty safe from the harshness and cruelty of the real world.

Cecil was jealous of me, too, though I did not realize it until one day, when it came to the surface and the open light of knowledge. For a little, it made me profoundly happy.

It was the fall and, one bright sunny afternoon, luckily, I had scored with a tall Texan, in town for the week-end. He had given me twenty dollars for my part in his afternoon of pleasure (he was a coarse man in his passions, and groaned and growled like some animal) but he was interesting to talk with and masculine to the utmost; as ruggedly built as a cactus, somewhat resembling one in his hairiness.

I had left Cecil in Jackson Square and had found him still waiting late that evening when I returned. I had not expected to be gone so long and, I discovered, he hadn't gone to a movie.

"Ah just didn't feel up to a show," he explained, his eyes on the pavement between his widely sprawled legs. "All that goddam shooting gives me a headache."

I knew this wasn't so, for he would howl like an animal and squirm in his seat when a hot gunfight was filling the screen.

I told him of my day's luck—a twenty dollar bill.

"Took you long enough," he said, puffing vigorously on his cigarette and surrounding his head with smoke as he revealed his disapproval.

I could read in his manner, his roundabout way of expressing his dislike of my going with other men, and there was a rising, tingling sensation within me as I realized what he was feeling.

"Let's you and I eat and then go to a show together," I suggested, putting my hand over his. "We'll take a holiday. There's a good show playing at the Saenger—King Kong."

"Na," he objects, thrusting his hands into his tight pants pockets, causing his crotch to bulge attractively. "I think I saw that one in Villa Platte—lot of monsters." He pauses and looks morosely around him, then out to the horizon, scarlet in the dying moments of sunset. "Ah hate all this crap, this waiting for you while you're off letting some goddam lonely man take out his loneliness on you—hate what it stands for. You're too good for this life, Bru—you're not like me."

"I'm not a bit better than you, Cecil," I said, bowing my head. "Not any more." Through my head begins the march of the long line of men who have had their way with me since I vowed to take care of Cecil. I, too, was repulsed . . . not at them . . . at me. It was then I realized, with a pang, that Cecil had never done some of the things I had done, in order that the two of us might eat—and he would never know.

"You will always be better," he insisted, looking at me squarely, the reflection of the dying sun deepening in his eyes. "For you're not this kind—and you never will be. It don't matter about me. Ah'm no good

anyway, but you, Bru . . ."

"What would you like for us to do, then?" I asked, wearing his words like a precious relic on my heart.

"Bru," he whispered, after a tense moment of silence, twisting then to face me on the bench, "instead of spending this twenty foolishly on a lot of food and shows, would you—would you do something else, instead?"

"Why, of course, Cecil," I answered, knowing in this moment I could refuse him nothing he might ask.

"Let's move in together," he said, shyly, not looking at me as he spoke. "It'd be cheaper, and we could live like human beings for once—set up housekeeping . . ."

CHAPTER SIX

We found a miniature apartment on the edge of the Vieux Carre on Burgundy Street. It fit us perfectly, for we were small, too—like dolls in a doll house.

It was entered by a flight of circular steps of wrought iron which came up the outside of the building, one flight, levelling to a small balcony looking out toward the Cathedral and the river. On it were a veritable forest of potted plants, Spanish dagger, snake fern and yellow moss. The wrought iron rails were laced with ivy and wisteria, delicately covering and softening the metal. The interior was not much . . . the cracked plaster was painted a dusky rose . . . but it was dry and comfortable to us, and it was home. The bed was wrought iron, gilded, and it sat upon risers, two steps up, and draped with mosquito net. A print from a calendar, a blonde nude by Zoe Mozert (like the ones seen so often in garages, hanging above the work benches) hung above the bed and there was a small wall bracket which held a little statue of the Virgin Mary. The kitchen required still another step up, like an attic cubby-hole, and so small only one of us at a time could be in it. But, at the end of it, there was a round window, overlooking tiled roofs where pigeons

played giving it something of the air of Paris (which impression I'd gotten from the movies I'd seen with Cecil) and, romantically, I thought of it in this way:

the nest of two lovers, overlooking the rooftops of Paris.

Cecil was happy about it and he spent most of his time there, tidying and decorating it while I was away. I still wouldn't let him hustle, in spite of the fact that, to keep up the rent and buy food for us meant I had to go double-time in effort and the much keener use of my wits. The demands of our new life forced me to employ every skill I had acquired, both mental and physical, to make ends meet. More often than I would admit, even to myself, I had to "do things" with the horrible men who picked me up, which I loathed with passionate revulsion. It became an endless nightmare of groping hands in the darkness –along Dauphine and Bourbon Streets and along the waterfront–hiding below some low-hanging roof, or in the shadow of thick hedges–beneath the pilings of the wharf or the canvas of a wharfed boat–in public toilets, or in dingy, desolate rooms–in the rear of barbershops, in parked cars, narrow stairway entrances, storage rooms and vacated warehouses . . . anywhere I could score with a man and find a safe alcove for him to snatch his dollar's worth, or five dollar's worth of pleasure. It was a long nightmare of wet mouths sliding up my thighs, of knotty hands pulling down my levis, of miserable groans, slobbering intonations from the murky darkness, of mushy, sickening voices, blubbering of love and adoration.

"What a gorgeous

"You're exquisite, my dear . . . What a gorgeous stem, like a rose in full bloom" . . . "You're precious—precious!" . . . "Could I have just one more taste, please? Just one, my goddess?" . . . "Would you let me

see it, honey-chile, here I'll strike a match—ah! you're too sweet to be screwed—let me eat you, dearie!" . . . "Kiss me—just once!" . . . and on and on. A steady stream of muffled and perverted pleas out of the darkness in which I seemed continually to exist, voices gasping out their loneliness with broken words between the smack of lascivious lips on me, hands groping for some contact to bring them impossible understanding as though they might find the core of the desperate and perverted hungers which they housed and, by understanding, find peace. The constant, draining effort in the dim and secret places to find, in my body, the elixir to cure their sickness from unhappiness and misery—the cure for their sodden, debased beings which might bring a flash of happiness and relief from the inner gnawing.

There were those times, too, lying on my belly in the wet dew, canopied by dark forms above me, hardly warm, only partially thawed by whiskey; times in some foul bed, smelling of old emissions and urine, with my body pressed into all the dirt of other times and other horrors; times in some dark alcove beneath the thump of unknowing feet on the stairs above, bending over, pants at my knees and body quivering from humiliating pain; times coiled in a mass of arms and legs, coming on with two, lashed by wet tongues, soaked by sweat and filth and groaning emissions

which soaked into my every pore and blanketed me until I choked. Times, hemmed into one corner of a toilet carpeted by soaked newspapers, a blubbery mass of sickly white flesh writhing up and down . . . a mirage of smells and sights and the sound of sick

words. Other times in the rumble seat of a car, far out on the Pontchartrain shores, filled with morbid fear at the threats: "eat it or walk, you fruity bitch," . . . "Ah brought you here to screw, babee . . . an' screw yoah gonta" . . . "you put your hand on my leg in Tangy's bar, remember? So you're gonna pay, you friggin' fairy . . . you're gonna pay on the blunt end of my stick!" Threats, promises, gnawing teeth, ape-like arms pulling me against, hard, hairy bodies; thighs crushing my shoulders; sweaty bodies driving me into soft leather, into the sand, into mattresses thorned with broken springs, loose wires and urine-fouled linen.

All for Cecil.

Whenever I returned to the apartment, always weary and a little more bewildered for the succeeding, continuing revelation of more of life's brutalities as the pages turned, Cecil would greet me with such wayward affection, I told myself it was worth it—all of it —and his affection only re-armed me for another day, another week, another carnal chapter, thick with the pages of revulsion and degradation. Cecil kept the apartment in tidy order—cooked, washed and added new things which he bought with the spending money I gave him; holding back his movie money for drapes, new paint for the walls, a picture, a potted plant, an ashtray. He was happy in his new home, and rarely

ever strayed from it except for the buying of food or things to put in it. He stopped going to movies except when we could go together. He didn't drink, which made him safe from the myriad of bars throughout the quarter and his sexual desires seemed to have gone dormant and girls drew him not at all. I had the

suspicion he lived solely for me, or for the comforts which his life with me afforded—that he lived, always, never forgetting the hard, mean times which he had gone through before we met. The sight of him filled me with a return of hope which rejected the existence of defeat in our future together, for he looked healthier under his safe, leisurely life of reading and eating three meals a day and sleeping in the security of a warm bed which my body bought for him. His eyes grew clear, his skin glowed and he took on a little weight as he began to look bountiful with robust health and good looks and, waif though he was, I loved him with a passion only self-confessed and, never, shared with him.

Though we slept close, usually, with our arms entwined, we never approached the other in desire (perhaps it was that both of us awaited the overture of the other) but sex was there, between us, a beautiful, untried treasure which we never touched, never dissipated.

While I managed enough money to keep us alive and fed, with a dry, attractive place to sleep and clothing to cover us, in my desperation to manage still more, I sometimes became bolder in my sexual pursuits. These unwary moves did not always result in

the greater gain. Oftentimes I collected a beating in farewell; was threatened with embarrassments and sometimes, was offered only harm and no cash for my exertions.

One time, I recollect with sharp bitterness, my reserve money was getting low (I always kept some hidden away in case I could not score), and the cold

of winter was coming on rapidly. I knew we would need heavier clothing and the bleak outlook took hold of my thoughts and emotions. I had wandered, a little after midnight, along the wharf, hopeful of finding some derelict who would part with a few dollars for whatever pleasure I could provide him. Along the Toulouse docks, I walked upon a sailor, standing with one foot on a mooring iron, his glowing cigarette coal marking him in the dark as a beacon to guide me to him. In the deepening fog, I should have taken the red glow for a warning of danger, but I went directly to him and struck up a conversation. He knew right off the bat what I was offering and agreed quickly, indicating his willingness by fingering the crotch of his winter blues.

"I need five dollars," I told him, feeling triumph in my breast.

"I'll give you ten if you treat me right, pretty boy," he said, taking my hand and laying it upon his hard thigh. "I've been at sea too long; I need a good screw."

We went under the shed, below the wharf where the wind was howling, coldly and savagely and he turned me over and took me, roughly. Then he beat me, kicked my buttocks and, shoving me away, cried:

"Whatever made you think screwing a goddamned fairy was worth money, you fruity bastard?"

When I reached the apartment, Cecil flew into a rage and was all for going out and hunting down my attacker for quick retaliation in the dark. But I begged him to forget it. I knew it had been my fault. I had made it too clear, from the beginning, though I didn't tell Cecil this. I had always tried to take his advice

about working to make a score.

"Always let them make the first move," was his unvarying advice, and—I discovered—it worked. But my desperation had driven me to a new boldness, a more reckless attitude. Or—the thought struck me suddenly—was I changing? The wonder chafed at me as Cecil bathed my wounds and then pressed his lips to the places the hard fists had struck, his touch dimming the pain. I knew it was worth it—and I wanted him, sexually, but I was afraid to make an advance for fear of his ridicule.

However, it was not long after, I discovered my desire for him was becoming more difficult to keep in hand. He was always so affectionate, it was very hard to restrain myself. Since Cecil—like Dany—was so utterly masculine, I longed for that essence as a substitute I could not have. I feared that, if Cecil and I had sexual relations, it would end our relationship; that something of our mutual regard and respect for each other would be lost in the act, gradually become tarnished and diluted and result in his drifting away from me. I did not want to lose Cecil. He was my reason for existence—all I had to live for or cared

about—so I started searching out other, masculine, young men and, purely for my own sexual pleasure, not for money, lay with them.

This was to be my purple winter.

Slowly I began changing my way of dress. My manner, too, under-went the process of change. Now it was I, rather than the dim and faceless line of old men, who lurked in the shadows like a dark wraith; who stood longingly on the corners with a sparkling

eye on the young transients who passed by, my stance wanton and my body poised in the unmistakably obvious attitude which sent its message to any who saw me and, plainer than words, told them what it was I desired from them. Any interest they displayed, in turn, would result in an intensifying of my posture, to emphasize that their impression was not mistaken; that I, truly, was what they thought and offered what they sought.

Many I made out with. It was surprising how large the number was. I never realized that young men, utterly masculine in their appearance and manner, hungered for play with their own sex so ravenously. I got no monetary return for my traffic with and attentions to these hard, cold-natured young men who were so warm and loving in the course of the heated action but became aloof, distant and disdainful when the release of their desire dulled their hunger. Whenever I found a good-looking boy with the requirements to fire my body, I would always close my eyes, pretending it was Cecil. In this way, I told myself, I was not actually having sex with somebody else, because the

actually having sex with somebody else, because the image of the one person I loved was constantly in the focus of my mind as the encounter writhed through to its conclusion. It instilled in me an increasing affection for Cecil and an enlarging appetite for the love I did not dare to claim from him.

Always, coming back to our apartment, I was a little ashamed following such encounters and, to ease my guilty unease, began to bring Cecil small gifts. There were times when I could hardly bear to look into the soft, trusting eyes of him and, so ashamed was I, that

in the night I would steal a kiss from him, coiling my arms about his head with its crown of curly hair while he slept. One night, I let my hand slide, tremblingly, up his leg, to his thigh. My body shook with mad desire as he lifted his body toward me, to receive my caress but, fearful as always, I took my hand abruptly away, feigning sleep. Afterward, lying beside him, my trembling continued as, like a thief caught in the act, I could distill from the tumbling riot of my mind no defense for my act. It took all my courage not to lift his body into my arms; to place my hot lips on his; to slide down, down, down to that beautiful, dark hollow and restore myself, intoxicate my reeling heart with the rich, sweet essence of him—as so many others, no doubt, had done in many a hasty abridgement of mouth and loin in some dingy bed, in the shadows of some moonlit park. They had taken him, heedlessly, not knowing the beautiful, the wonderful treasure of him—but I could not, dared not touch the only beauty which remained in my life.

Dany and I, once long ago, had laughed and joked when, in the work on the farm, nothing had gone the way we intended. We were far from accepting the philosophy of our laughing comment at such times and one or the other of us would remark: "Well, it goes on like this before it changes—and gets worse." In our light-heartedness, despite the weight of labor, we never believed it. It was said in fun.

Then, events conspired to make the words fit the circumstances; binding my ability to resist with cutting force. Now the words came home to roost in my heart and the hard, sour meaning, at this turn, seemed

more truth than the gospel.

It was a cold afternoon in late November and Cecil hod decided to luxuriate in the cozy warmth of a double feature at the Orpheum Theatre while I was to pay a call on the Texan who, surprisingly, had returned to town and offered me thirty dollars to spend several hours with him. On my way to his hotel, I spotted a young boy about my own age taking shelter from the biting Gulf wind in the narrow entrance to a flower-shop doorway. I recognized him from a previous encounter we had shared, thinking how much he resembled Cecil, with his muscular thighs, covered with light, curly hair; and how I had delighted in the proud, erect excitement which pulsed in the generous dimension of his aroused body, I thought to tarry from my appointment. With my eyes and mind full of Cecil, I paused and asked the boy to come to the apartment with me and he agreed, at once. I did not realize he had two companions, standing vigil in another doorway not far off.

way not far off.

When I had taken my fill of him, pretending all the while that it was Cecil, yet shame-ridden because he lay in the bed where Cecil and I lay, night after night, in each other's arms, he rose with a smile. Mistaking his expression for satisfaction, as he dressed hurriedly, I was thinking I still had time to meet the Texan and claim my thirty dollars before Cecil returned from the movies. Finished dressing, he opened the door out onto the balcony to reveal his two companions waiting there, the pair having followed us and waited on us there until we had finished our ball.

"You friggin' kid fairy," one of them grinned, evilly,

locking the door from the inside and pulling me to my feet, "every goddam place I go, you're always there with your tongue hangin' out! I'll learn you not to pick up my little brother!"

I was terrified at my predicament.

They beat me unmercifully and then they stripped our place, taking everything of possible value, including my cowboy boots, my Stetson hat (my working clothes!) the new jackets I had bought for Cecil and me for the cold winter . . . they took everything!

They even took my tiny beaded bag which Cecil had once given me as a joke (to mark our relationship, he had said) and which I cherished as a result and used instead of a wallet. I recalled Rudolph Valentino carrying a powder puff, so I had hung onto this small bag for this reason as well as the sentimental value I attached to the gift.

"Look!" one of them laughed as he went through it,

"she even carries a purse—I'll betcha she squats to piss!"

Finally they were gone, leaving me with a blood-laced body, with my sin and my humiliation.

When Cecil returned, he flew into a rage. He washed my face and body and kissed me, sobbing at every move.

"This is the end!" I cried, holding him tightly to me in my agitation, "I'm going home!"

"Don't leave me, Bru," he begged, pleading desperately with his warm, beautiful face buried in the planes of my chest. "Ah can't make it, ever no more—not without you!"

"I'm not leaving you," I tried to explain to him, the

pain of my cuts and bruises beating in every corner of me and inflaming my emotions as well as my nerves. "I'm going to go and, somehow, make amends to papa . . . tell him we can work on the farm . . . that I've changed. Then I'll come back for you, Baby, and take you away from all this—this horrible life in this miserable place!"

He lifted his face to me and there was a glory in his eyes.

"Do you know what you called me?" he asked, tears beginning to glisten on his lashes.

I nodded my head.

"Baby," I repeated, softly and meaningfully.

"We're both getting to be as fruity as a tootsie-roll," he said, trying to laugh but with a voice too choked with emotion to bring it off, completely.

"I don't care a damn!" I retorted, and meant every

word of it. "But, when I come back for you, we won't ever have to worry about this kind of life, again, Cecil –never, anymore."

"You won't come back, Bru," he said, and his chin trembled then, the tears spilling down his cheeks. "They never come back, Bru, never!"

"But I will, Cecil!" I cried, fervently.

"Remember Duel," he said, softly, putting his head back on my chest once more. "Duel never came back, Bru . . ."

CHAPTER SEVEN

I hitch-hiked home and, because of the thievery of the three miserable boys who had robbed and beaten me, I wore only a pair of levis, a soiled sweat-shirt (which Cecil had used to clean the furniture) and a pair of ragged tennis shoes I managed to find in a Goodwill Store on St. Philip Street. It was early December and, in this part of the land, fiercely and painfully cold. In addition to that, it had snowed and there was no chance relief by means of the sun, the skies being leaden and every movement of air was like

skies being leaden and every movement of air was like a knife in its keenness, coming off snow-covered ground and freezing all it touched. I was near frozen completely through when I got out of the old model-T in the valley which led to Papa's farm. The driver, taking pity on my blue-lipped agony, tossed me a worn car blanket as I stumbled out onto the frozen dirt. Scooping it up, he threw it to me, a look of concern on his face.

"Take this, lad, and wrap it around you. You'll be dead of the pneumonee before you get a half-mile . . ."

I thanked him, gratefully, and pulled the wool around my shaking shoulders and began the agonizing walk up the long hill, the teeth of the wind finding me here, despite the shelter of the blanket, with cruel gashes at its every lash across the fields. By now, it was night and the sky was clear; the stars snapping

like brilliant flashes in the frozen, black velvet of the sky and the ghostly light of them on the snow-covered fields, recalled the early wonder I'd felt when Mama had told me of the birth of Jesus. Cold and miserable as I was, I felt the wish that, like him, I could be re-born and the stench, the tatters, the guilt and the filth of my life washed off and out of me and I could look again at the world with clean eyes and see none of the sickness, none of the slime which clung to me with such a relentless hold.

Going over the rail fences and through the little thicket of naked plum trees, their limbs silver with icicles, I started up the hill. They say when you return home after a long time away, everything seems smaller. It did not, that night, to me. The dark shape

of the house, like a black blot on a sad heart—the barn and the outhouses—all looked as if they sprawled, huge, across the star-studded sky, now that I was down off the hills. As I struggled with the agonizing cold, my eyes blinking and tears icing on my face, it seemed I could never make it to the familiar place which was there, just a freezing eternity before me.

Along the ruts of the hill, the snow was gone, now, except for the north and east sides of the hedges and the highest places; the lane to the house was trapped with thinly-frozen puddles where the snow had melted and, in the dark, my feet broke through, time after time, to become wet, frozen through, stinging and aching with every step I took, although I could not feel their touch on the ground. The wind, in its chill fury, lashed the ends of the blanket into my

hardened, chilled cheeks.

The stone house was dark, weirdly dark as though no living soul now dwelt within it and, for an empty, aching moment, I stood in the agony of the open cold, daring not to take another step forward. Finally, my misery forced me up the snow-covered steps to knock, with painful knuckles, on the door.

Soon a lamp glowed, moving through the dark within, ghostly until it flared at the glass in the door.

"Who's calling in the middle of the night?" came my father's hard, demanding voice as the door opened. He stood before me, in his gray, long underwear, the cold eyes hard in the lamplight.

"It's me papa!" I cried, shaking, miserable to my very soul.

"So," he said, sourly, after a moment, "you've come back." His voice rose as he spoke.

"Yes, Papa," I replied through my stiffened jaws, fighting to get the words out through numb lips. "I—I've come back home, Papa."

He studies me for a moment, his face colder yet than the raw countryside about us, relishing my poor attire, my bruised and cut face and mouth.

"Well," he said, contemptuously, making a motion to close the door, "you can just turn around and go back."

"Wait, Papa!" I pleaded, desperate, my eyes on the golden light and yearning for warmth which lay inside, trapped within the old hill stone of the walls, the low ceiling and the fire's red embers on the bright hearth. "I've changed, Papa. I'm not a child of sin, anymore."

"You've changed," he agreed in a growl, condemning me with his eyes, "but its a change for the worse. Blaize wrote me all about you—how you refused to work in his shop—how you turned to the street companions like you, as bad or worse than a common whore."

I cringed, but desperation drove me to plead, heedless of truth. "Did Blaize dare?" I stammered, breath escaping my lungs. "It's all a lie, Papa . . . Blaize drove me to the streets with trying to sue me like a prostitute in his own bed, Papa . . ."

"Better his bed than where you ended," he said, flatly. "Blaize tried to help you." My soul curled

within me. I was miserable from cold, desolated at his hostility to his own son and heartbroken that he wouldn't even ask me in out of the freezing cold.

"Papa . . . can I come in?" I begged.

"For what?" he demanded, hand still on the door-latch.

"Papa!" I blurted in a frenzy, fighting for words—any words to keep the door open to the possibility of the warmth inside. "Papa, how's Mama—how is she, Papa?"

"She's dead," he said tonelessly and uncaring, not blinking an eye.

"Dead!" I cried, feeling the collapse within me of my knowledge of her, alive; the golden hours I spent with her. "But—h-how, Papa? How could she die?"

"Oh, she came back, just like you," he answered, morosely. "Stayed back in your room—never would come out of it—just pined to death, that's what I called it. Grieved herself into a stupid sickness and

died."

"Mama grieved?" I gulped.

"Over you—you, who ain't worth a minute of her grief, let alone her whole life. She gave everything to you."

I swallowed hard at the truth of his words. I wasn't worth her grief—no one's grief, for that matter. I turned on the porch and my feet fumbled at the descending steps.

"Good-bye, Papa," I said, half-insane, I know, the words coming from instinct. The door closed behind

me and darkness covered the porch behind me.

Now beyond all feeling, all caring, I stumbled down the steps toward the barn—down the slope toward the little stone house where Dany Buck lived with his parents. When I was half-way there, I saw a thin spire of smoke from their chimney and, in my grief and dismay I halted in the resolution to go back, but something drove me on. There was a light in the window, dim, but a symbol of life-giving warmth in the black paralyzing freeze of the friendless night. It called to me—staved off the onset of the feeling of death which was clutching at my faint and fluttering heart in the emptiness within me. I struggled up to the little window and looked in. On the hearth, a fire burned, a slow-burning fire which brought to me the stark agony of my freezing, shivering body once again. Before the hearth on a rocker, sat Dany Buck. The beautiful, broad brow looked weary. His long, dark lashes which, despite their thickness and length had never made him look the less manly, lay on cheeks grown thinner in this year I had been

gone; his face showed the fine, clean shape of the bone beneath it more than I remembered that it used to. His great hands lay lightly on the arms of the chair and he had toed off his boots, sitting in sock feet with his massive legs clad in the tight jeans he always wore. The great thighs spread to the warmth of the hearth before them, they glowed invitingly with warmth and strength and I longed to burst in, to bury my head in the hollow of them and pour out the burden of my despair and my heart break.

My soul cried, silently, passionately:

"Oh Dany, Dany . . . I love you . . .!"

He had a letter laid atop one thigh and I wondered, wearily, who it might be from. Think as I tried, in the muddle and the confused panic of a life I knew, for sure now, as lost forever, I tried to think who might be writing Dany Buck. My Dany. Was it from some girl? Was Dany in love with her? Had he courted her on the creek banks, walked the hills with her, lured her into the deep woods with him? I could feel no jealousy, now, only a persistent wonder at what he might have done with her, knowing what he had done with me.

As I gazed, broken-hearted and dying within, the tears again rolled from my eyes, blurring the golden warmth of Dany in my vision, as, almost idly, I toyed with the idea of Dany with a girl, lying in the dim secrecy of the pine shade, on the fragrant needles, away from prying eyes. I knew something of girls from my school-days with them; knew they liked to tease and coquette and I could see Dany's puzzled eyes, in my mind, trying to keep up with the turns and

twists of her mind and words as she befuddled him with talk, offering him the suggestion of her body's secrets, but veiling the thought with all sorts of flutterings and flights of words and laughs and looks and poses.

And how might Dany have acted, with all the teasing, tempting tortures this mysterious girl—whoever she could be—might put him through? When the mighty hunger of him gathered in the tight crotch

of his jeans, did he do with her as he had with me? She would not be clad in tight, simple jeans which he could strip down from her body's secrets in almost one sweep of his powerful hands. I could see him, achingly to me, now, struggling to find his way through the ruffles and skirts and protesting legs and the twisting and writhing of her body in a pretended rage to escape. But no girl whom Dany wanted could ever escape the total power of him—his desire or his muscles—which would overpower all her resistance as he bared at last her secrets with a sweep of his hand, to snatch the tight confinement of her last, protective garment from her thighs to reveal the secret thing she harbored there. And, crouched on the massive haunches, between the struggling thighs, did he rip open the straining buttons to withdraw his great, pulsing manhood and proceed to lean to the act of thrusting the huge, purple tip of it deep within her; to pin her like a petal on a thorn, harder, deeper, more vigorously until her cries were muted in the suffocation of her impalement and her emotions and the great, dark bulges of what lay below his engorging shaft pressed against the soft, cleft hips, forcing them

apart, harder and harder, struggling and pounding against the tender flesh until her body, too, was drowned with the hot, plunging essence of him as his figure beat hers into the scattering needles and her cries shrilled and quavered in the ecstasy of him . . .?

My sickness grew and swelled within me as he sat, motionless, the letter from this woman of my frantic imagination lying still in motionless scrutiny under his

great, dark eyes. As my mind's eye lashed me with its swift pictures of my love's betrayal, it brought other pictures in their wake—of Duel and Cecil and Blaize and the nauseous and revolting line of all those in between and past and there, still waiting. Waiting on the wharves, behind the sheds, in the water-closets—wherever the bestial appetites of lonely and perverted men could find you and take you and use you—for a few dollars . . .

His eyes were closed now, Dany Buck's eyes, as my forehead fell onto the window sill, not conscious of its cold; and the wormwood and the gall surged through me and I could hear the lash and feel the bitter sting of the words I knew myself to be—shredding me inside and cutting whatever bound me to life into useless, contracting pieces:

Trash—filth—scum—dirt—you friggin' fairy, you . . . !

And I knew, weakly, the truth of these words, and every other contemptuous, degrading mock which could be made of me. I knew I had become these things through my own weakness, through the confusion of my mind and my heart, through the stupid and doltish ignorance of a life which had sheltered me so that I did not guess—could not decide upon being

what I was intended to be, so little did I know and so hungry was I to be *something* in response to the clamorous, contending hungers which had raged inside me.

I was lost, now . . . ended and lost and I raised my head for one more look at my once-upon-a-time beloved, My beautiful Dany. He slept, now, the great,

lovely head fallen forward, the massive chin resting upon his chest. Dany was pure and sweet and noble—and I was gutter ooze and slimy worthlessness. As wonderful and as wholesome as the baby lambs, warm in the hay thatch beneath the snow was Dany and I filled my eyes with him, knowing that I must turn away. I had lived in filth—I had become filth—I could not bear to look any longer at his clean, grave beauty. I had no longer any right to look and yearn for him; because of my unworthiness I could not have looked him in the eye, nor spoken his name, had he discovered me and come to the door.

Nor could I bring myself to go in—far less would I have dared to drag my miserable being into the clean air of the room in which he slept; to rouse him from his happy dreams; to drip the dark poison of what I had become into his clean, unspoiled and peaceful existence. Like an elf which had drunk too deeply of the overpowering mead to know whether his feet are upon the ground or in the air, I pushed myself back from the window, dizzily, the jewel-laden velvet of the night sky spinning above me as I turned, stiffly, silently, numbly from this last, heart-breaking vision of beauty . . .

But, I could not help it, I looked back for one

straining, aching moment at him; longing for him, hungering for his purity, his beauty, the taste of the beauty in his mouth on mine, longing for the feel of his strong, crushing arms around my quivering shoulders, the purifying feel of his heated body arching mine in his ecstasy. Feeling as though I had,

somehow, touched something which would stain from my handling, I stumbled away, into the dark with never another look behind. My feet, remembering, found the lane again in the bitter dark as I retraced my steps, one numb stumble following upon another. Slowly the house drew nearer and passed abreast of me, a huge, hostile bulk in the freezing dark and I shuddered, inside, at the memory of my miserable father . . . and my poor, gentle Mama, lying now in some grave I knew not where . . .

"Goodbye," I whispered, weakly to Mama, as the house fell slowly behind me; "goodbye," to Dany, back down the lane, sleeping in peace and sweetness. I felt the sob catch in my throat but I was too weak to bring it up—it died there and the bitter air rushed in, aching as it passed to cut at the feeble warmth which remained inside me.

I cannot see too clearly, now and stumble as I plod. The wonder of why I keep on moving, when it is so useless and makes my legs ache so, begins to seep through me and it becomes more and more difficult to make each step follow the last. I think that I am walking to go back to Cecil—Cecil waiting on the bench in the cold square. But, he would not be there —he would be somewhere, I hope desperately, out of the cold.

And then I wonder what I can say to Cecil when I see him again. My return would be as empty-handed as Duel's empty promises to me and Cecil would only look at me, the hope falling deep in his big blue eyes as he realized my failure had slammed another gate

against him in his senseless struggle to stay alive. If I went back, I would only take the two of us back into the same whirlpool, going nowhere, being nowhere in its spinning. There was no direction our lives together could take which could ever make them better than they were . . . the journey to nothing with two frightened and bewildered souls, lost in the normal pattern of things, stumbling and flopping down an endless, dark sewer . . .

The dark sewer, peopled by the long, dim, never-ending line of old men, bold men, young men, harsh men, revolting and dirty men like animals, with fetid breath and stinking repulsive bodies. But, where else was there to go?

The long lane ended and, in numbed surprise I saw the road stretching away in either direction from where I stood. I looked up it, into blackness and down it—toward the way I'd come back home again—and it was just as dark. Nothing moved in the night at this hour, well past midnight. No car on the road, the faint star-shine the only lamp for my dead feet. I looked down at them, trying hard to see the dirty blurs of them in the gloom, but could not because the wind had again whipped tears from my squinting, tortured eyes.

I wrapped the blanket more closely around me, but it was only a gesture. I could feel no protection from

it, no warmth was left to hold inside it, but I clung to it, nonetheless. Faint and weak with my own despairing, lost in the pit of a loneliness too overpowering to longer think about. I was weary past all experience.

longer think about, I was weary past [illegible]
Turning from the road, I stumbled, then crawled to the fence, huddling into the shelter of the dry ditch beside it.

Here, suddenly, it seemed warm and snug. Out of the bitter wind which searched for me, overhead, I felt secure and safe. Why struggle against it? I reasoned. I'll rest for awhile, until a car comes by, going to New Orleans. I curled into an aching ball, inside the cover of the blanket, and felt the warmth grow, spreading through me with a sweet, relaxing feeling. I lay, happy for a moment, in the mysterious comfort and savored it, feeling a quivering ball of elation in my belly at having outwitted the knife-edge of the wind which rattled the dead stalks above my head. I heard the clatter of an engine and, looking down the road, the dim, bouncing lights of an approaching vehicle winked in the distance through the night.

"He's pretty far down," I told myself. "I'll rouse up and hitch a ride when he comes up to the last rise there . . ." My head dropped back on my bent arm. "I'll rest for a moment," I whispered, "just for a moment . . ."

Next morning, Dany Buck in his mackinaw and snug, warm knit cap, wondered why the mares were dancing in excitement in the fence corner down by the road. Walking down the lane, he noted the broken tops of puddles which had re-frozen during the night, and

the ragged, muddy freeze of foot-prints here and there.

"I wonder who made those?" he inquired of himself, puzzled and hastened his gait as the mares whinnied and danced. "Now what's tha trouble, pretty ones?" he asked, quietly as he came to the corner of the lane and, puzzled that his soothing had no effect on the mares, walked a step beyond the fence line. Something in the ditch beneath the rails took his eye—it looked like something wrapped in a blanket, he thought as he stepped through the dead growth . . .

The heavy thud of Dany's footsteps on the front porch aroused Brutus Toro from his coffee in wonder at what the hired man was doing, coming up to he house at this hour. Opening the door, he was confronted by the huge figure, with burning eyes, bearing a blanket-wrapped burden.

"What is it?" he demanded, brusquely, taking his pipe from his mouth irritably.

"It's tha son, little Bru," he said in a growl, "frozen to death in the ditch beside the road."

Toro raised his eyes to the hired man's.

"Come home to be with his Mama," he said, bitterly. "And the cost of his planting falls to me." He started to replace his pipe, then gestured with it toward a corner of the porch. "Put him there," he said, without emotion. "I'll have the undertaker in . . ."

"His death is on our hands," Dany said, the eyes never ceasing their hold on the others'. He gestured to the porch and the steps where the faint prints of Bru's sneakers remained frozen. "I got him turned out, and

you turned him out again—to die," the big man said,

turning. "We'll share a spot in hell together for this . . . he finished, as he moved off the porch.

Brutus spat over the porch rail.

"Get the lambs in," he grated, unfeelingly. "You've dawdled over this, late . . ." He glanced again at the blanket-wrapped body. "And I can see that thief of a body-snatcher wanting another nine prices for this one. I'll take care of him—and this can lie beside his Mama for the cost of no more land . . ." he mused, frowning.

He sighed and slammed the door.

THE END

MY PURPLE WINTER

. . . as the son of my insensitive father, I suddenly realized that no one — certainly none of us — had really cared what Dany felt or said or did . . . except that he work. The same as a horse or an ox or a mule. It stung me, in this breath-taking moment. encircled by his hard-muscled arms, to know how lacking we had allowed his life to be. I wanted to make it up to him, desperately.

"Dany!" I cried, putting all my love for him into the one glorious word, "I only want one thing—your happiness! If you are ever unhappy, then I shall want to die!"

"Oh, my little Bru!" he gasped, hoarsely, his words having the ring of an angel's whisper close in my ear. He turned my naked body to face his, sweeping me into his arms again, his dark head bent over mine; and he kissed me, full on the lips . . .